

INSTITUTION, DISCIPLINE AND GENDER

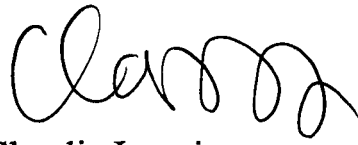
**~~Discipline, Gender and Institution:~~**  
**an empirical study of in/exclusion in undergraduate  
American Literature and Political Thought classes**

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**Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy  
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I declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Claudia Lapping', with a stylized, cursive script.

Claudia Lapping

24/06/04

The thesis, including footnotes, abstract and contents list, but not including bibliography, is 87 995 words.

## ABSTRACT

This research clarifies some processes of inclusion and social (re)production within the UK higher education system. It constitutes a description of the realisation in practice of differential modes of participation in undergraduate classes. The analysis presented here foregrounds the interaction between gender, academic discipline and educational institution in the production of these differential modes of participation. To do this, the thesis conceptualises gender, discipline and institution as relatively stable, relatively autonomous discursive fields, in relation to which students are positioned/position themselves when they contribute to class discussions.

The empirical basis of the thesis comprises my observations of four undergraduate degree modules. I videoed a series of sessions on Political Thought and American Literature modules in a 'new', access oriented university and a 'traditional', highly selective university. I interviewed both students and tutors, basing the interview on extracts from the observed sessions.

The opening chapters present an initial analytic description of the disciplines, the institutions and the conception of gender that constitute the relatively stable structures in relation to which students position themselves. The description of the disciplines constitutes a detailed account of the object, methodology, and thus of the form of legitimate knowledge claims in Political Thought in contrast to American Literature. It also foregrounds the differential social positioning of the two disciplines. The conceptualisation of gender is based on a Lacanian definition of the feminine.

The later chapters constitute my interpretation of students' positioning in the observed sessions. The main argument is that the intersections between discursive fields overdetermine the extent to which students can construct a position within the class that is both legitimate, in relation to the discipline, and coherent, in relation to the students' gender, institutional context and their existing interests and experiences. This analysis constitutes an innovative framework for the sociological description of the relationship between gender and academic disciplines.

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## Chapter 1

# INTRODUCTION TO THE OBJECT OF STUDY

### 1.1. Introduction

In the context of competing claims about the possible egalitarian effects of the expansion in the UK higher education system, this thesis clarifies some of the processes by which students may be included or marginalized, and identifies ways in which these processes are constituted within, and thus tend to reproduce, pre-existing social relations. The very general questions addressed here are: how and whether academic disciplines and institutions that might be said to have an explicitly politicised or inclusive agenda are indeed, in any sense, more inclusive; and, if there are differences between disciplines and institutions in relation to educational inclusion, how do these affect the positioning of students within the classroom?

The object of analysis can be described at several distinct levels. At the highest level of abstraction the thesis is an attempt to describe the production of subject positions within the social order as a whole. At this level the object of study can be described as the relationships between the discursive regulations of different social fields: specifically the fields of academic disciplines, higher education institutions and gender. The thesis is also a description of the social positioning of academic disciplines, and from this perspective its object of study can also be described as the relationship between features of academic disciplines and external criteria, such as class and gender. At a more concrete level the thesis is a description of educational settings within the UK higher education system and the object is constituted in the interactions observed within specific classrooms and institutions.

In the rest of this chapter I set out some concepts that can be used to identify the object of study at these different levels. I begin with the most abstract: a description of the interaction between social fields, drawing on the conceptual language of Chantal

Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau. I then outline previous descriptions of the academic field and the interaction between academic, social and economic interests, drawing largely on the work of Pierre Bourdieu. I relate some of the issues raised by Bourdieu to my own educational biography and use my own experience to identify gaps in Bourdieu's account. Bourdieu's approach is then contrasted with that of Basil Bernstein, who pays more attention to the internal structuring of knowledge and how this relates to the structuring of the social field. The final section of the chapter begins to move towards a more empirical description of the object of study, in an analysis of the distinctions it is possible to make between 'old', highly selective and 'new' access oriented institutions in the UK higher education system. The chapter as a whole, therefore, moves from a highly abstract description of the social field to a more concrete analysis of specific types institutions. It is thus structured as a series of different introductions to the object of research.

## **1.2. The concept of overdetermination and a relational conception of student positions**

The sites that form the empirical object of study are American Literature and Political Thought modules on undergraduate degree courses. I observed a series of sessions on two American Literature modules and two Political Thought modules, in two traditional, highly selective universities and in two 'new', access oriented universities. The research design thus enabled me to compare the same discipline in universities with different positions in relation to social inclusion, and also to make comparisons across disciplines that occupy very different positions in relation to existing power structures. American Literature explicitly addresses issues of class, ethnicity and gender within the curriculum, and it takes a generally critical approach to the analysis of social hierarchies. Political Thought, in contrast, can be described as a normative, rather than a descriptive discipline, and as such does not construct a critical analysis of existing power structures, but rather seeks to provide an account of justifiable forms of government. I participated in a series of at least six sessions on each of the four modules. I videoed the sessions and interviewed students and tutors about the discussions that I had observed. The central section of each interview was based on

extracts from the transcripts of the classes, and the questions were aimed at eliciting the views of the participants on the nature of the discipline they were studying, through their direct articulation of issues and concepts that had arisen during class discussions. The selection of these sites was thus intended to enable the analysis of academic disciplines as articulated within contrasting social and educational settings, in order to reveal how the discipline and setting each contribute to the positioning of students within class discussions.

Through the analysis of this observational and interview data, the thesis develops a relational understanding of student positioning in undergraduate classrooms. The analysis foregrounds the interaction between gender, academic discipline and institution in the production of positions available to students. To do this, the thesis conceptualises gender, discipline and institution as relatively stable, relatively autonomous discursive fields in relation to which students are positioned and position themselves, when they contribute to class discussions. The resulting student positions can thus be seen as a product of the overlap between features of different discursive fields. This conceptualisation is framed within a theoretical understanding of society as constituted through the overdetermination of social fields and identities.

There are several distinct sources of the concept of ‘overdetermination’. One use of the term is more Freudian and one is more Althusserian. Freud’s use of the term refers to sources of affects in individual human subjects. Althusser, in contrast, uses the term to explain the nature of change at a socio-historical level. In the original psychoanalytic usage, different sources of symptoms of affect are united within the ego’s attempt to unify the contradictory forces within the individual. Thus, although the sources may be derived from distinct events or experiences, the object of their representation in the production of any instance of affect is unified (Freud, 1900). This contrasts with Althusser’s use of the concept, which emphasises the autonomy of different social fields in the production of any historical change (Althusser, 1962, see also, Jameson, 1981, and Callinicos, 1989, pp. 128 – 132). Althusser explicitly rejects the Hegelian model of the dialectic as an ‘expressive totality’ driven by one ‘internal spiritual principle’ (p. 103). These two uses of the concept of overdetermination would appear to operate at quite different levels of analysis, the psychic and the socio-historical. However, recent

developments within social theory offer a fuller articulation of the relationship between the two conceptual levels (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, Mocnik, 1993, Zizek, 1989).

In each of these recent formulations the concept of overdetermination is based on the incompleteness of both subjective and social identities: the notion that neither a human subject nor a social field is ever fully constituted. Thus, it is not the case that gender, discipline and institution can be conceptualised as autonomous, discursive fields that are already fully constituted when they interact within a specific historical and social context. Rather, the very constitution of Political Thought or American Literature is only realisable within a particular institutional context, and in relation to particular gendered hierarchies, and therefore neither discipline is ever fully realisable as a separate identity. Similarly, the gender of an individual student is always negotiated within a particular classroom context, and in relation to a particular disciplinary methodology and culture: to attempt to delimit what counts as feminine or masculine without reference to the specificities of different contexts is therefore a misleading, totalising move. Even the attempt to define multiple femininities, within this conceptual framework, is doomed to failure, as Laclau and Mouffe suggest:

... the dispersion of subject positions cannot constitute a solution: given that none of them manages to consolidate itself as a *separate position*, there is a game of overdetermination among them that reintroduces the horizon of an impossible totality. (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 121 – 122)

However, this move does not belie any form of description or analysis: 'The impossibility of an ultimate fixity of meaning implies that there have to be partial fixations – otherwise the very flow of differences would be impossible' (ibid, p. 112). Such fixity occurs, Laclau and Mouffe suggest, when a set of meanings, such as different forms of sexual difference, express a common relation within a specific symbolic system:

... while it is absolutely correct to question the idea of an original sexual division represented a posteriori in social practices, it is also necessary to recognise that overdetermination among the diverse sexual differences produces a systematic effect of sexual *division*. Every construction of sexual differences, whatever their multiplicity and heterogeneity, invariably constructs the feminine as a pole sub-ordinated to the masculine ... The ensemble of social practices, of

institutions and discourses which produce woman as a category, are not completely isolated but mutually reinforce and act upon one another. (ibid, p. 117 – 118)

This suggests that it is possible to understand a multiplicity of social instances in terms of a similarity in their symbolic position, which thus overdetermines, and fixes, the social divisions instantiated in each separate instance. Alternatively, where a contradiction exists between social instances or discursive fields, the effect of overdetermination can be to reinforce the fragility or marginality, rather than the fixity, of certain terms. This antagonism occurs where ‘the presence of the Other prevents me from being totally myself’ (ibid, p. 125). Thus while the dispersal of different performances of femininity coincide to overdetermine and fix the meaning of sexual difference, in some contexts, specific instances of femininity will be in an antagonistic relationship to other discursive practices. This thesis will suggest, for example, that this kind of antagonism exists between academic and feminine performances in the classroom, where each of these identities can prevent the other from ‘being totally itself’. In instances of both overdetermination and antagonism, meanings are produced within the context of a dominant signifying system. Thus it is possible to conceptualise subjectivities, or discursive fields as essentially incomplete identities, made meaningful but never fully realised within an essentially limited symbolic order. These identities, while incomplete and fragile, nevertheless provide a meaningful structure for analysis.

Within this framework, then, the analysis of data within this thesis can be conceptualised as a process with two distinct stages. The first stage sets out the criteria by which it is possible to identify institutions, disciplines and gender as meaningful, relatively stable discursive fields. While there are generally available criteria for the identification of different types of institutions that are sufficient for the analysis undertaken here, a specification of criteria for identifying disciplinary and gendered positions is more fully articulated within the thesis. The criteria for identification of the disciplines are developed through the analysis of the class transcripts, and constitute a detailed account of the object, methodology, and thus of the form of legitimate knowledge claims in Political Thought in relation to American Literature. The criteria for the identification of gender are theoretically, rather than empirically derived, and are based on a Lacanian conception of feminine *jouissance*. The derivation of both sets of



criteria within the thesis attempts to maintain a sense of the contingent and incomplete nature of the identities that they describe.

The second stage of the thesis constitutes my interpretation of how students' positioning within the observed sessions can be described in relation to the discursive fields of institution, disciplines and gender defined in the first stage of the analysis. The interpretation reveals how the interaction between these incomplete discursive identities overdetermines the in/exclusion of specific students or groups of students. It suggests that the contrasting forms of knowledge in the two disciplines have a significant effect on the extent to which students can construct a position that is both legitimate, in relation to the discipline, and coherent, in relation to their existing interests, experience, gender, and educational institution.

The thesis thus offers a way of describing the positioning of students within higher education classrooms, at the same time as offering some insight into the process of construction of such descriptions.

### **1.3. Bourdieu's description of the academic field**

Bourdieu's analysis of the academic world in *Homo Academicus* (Bourdieu, 1996) is carried out at a very different level to my own work. While my research is based in the classroom, his study maps out career paths and curricula changes in the French university system as a whole during the 1960s, in the period of initial expansion of higher education in France. His observations reveal some of the complex interdependencies between disciplines, social class and academic position. At the same time, as is typical of Bourdieu's work, he struggles to maintain a sense of the limits of his own interpretations. Thus both in explicit subject matter, as a description of academic knowledge as a socially situated object, and also in its concurrent exploration of the limits of written sociology, *Homo Academicus* provides a useful context within which to situate my own study. More specifically, the limits of the study, when read in

relation to my own educational biography, exemplify some of the gaps that my study aims to fill.

Bourdieu suggests that the expansion in higher education has very specific effects on the personal struggles for position undertaken by individuals with different class origins. The increase in numbers of academic positions resulting from the expansion in student numbers simultaneously represents significant shifts in the values and hierarchies of the profession. These shifts involve both a lowering in academic qualifications of entrants to academic positions, and also an adjustment in the balance of power between disciplinary fields. The greatest increase in academic posts in France between 1963 and 1967, the period Bourdieu examined, was in the newer disciplines of linguistics, psychology and sociology. However, a significant proportion of these new posts were in the lower grades, and of the disciplines included in the study, sociology and psychology had the highest ratio of assistant lecturers and temporary senior lecturers to tenured professors (Bourdieu, 1996, table 11b, appendix 2.2). This relative subordination of the social sciences, in terms of career progression, is exacerbated, Bourdieu suggests, by their disciplinary subordination to the natural sciences resulting from 'the rise in natural sciences and scientific values on the cultural stock exchange' (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 121). This 'doubly subordinate position' Bourdieu continues, explains why the social sciences 'still function as a refuge for bourgeois children with fair to middling results' (p. 121). He links the thwarted ambitions of upper middle class students to the diverse characteristics of academic sociologists, observing that the relatively high proportion of non-normaliens<sup>1</sup> with upper middle class origins in the lower grades of academic sociologists (p. 171) and of ex-philosophers in the higher grades suggests that sociology is a refuge for low achievers, i.e. those from the upper middle classes who wished to be academics but who were not of a calibre to get higher status jobs in the canonical disciplines. Thus the lack of job security and disciplinary prestige found in the social sciences are frequently combined with the expectations of success and social status that are a symptom of a bourgeois upbringing. What ensues is a struggle for position within both institutional and disciplinary hierarchies.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Normalien' refers to graduates of the Ecole Normale Supérieure, and is thus a mark of high academic achievement.

Bourdieu's observations, it should be noted, do not only constitute an objective description of the structure of the field, but also offer an insight into the visceral emotional effects on participants, struggling to secure and stabilise their own positions:

... the existence, form and direction of change depend not only on the 'state of the system', i.e. the 'repertoire' of possibilities that it offers, but also on the balance of forces between social agents who have entirely real interests in the different possibilities available to them as stakes and who deploy every sort of strategy to make one set or the other prevail. When we speak of a field of position takings, we are insisting that what can be constituted as a system for the sake of analysis is not the product of a coherence seeking intention or an objective consensus (even if it presupposes unconscious agreement on common principles) but the product and prize of a permanent conflict; ... the generative, unifying principle of this 'system' is the struggle... (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 34)

Bourdieu describes two effects of this struggle in the context of the French university system in the 1960s. Firstly, the relatively low status of sociologists in comparison with academics in the more traditional humanities subjects explains their visible and radical role in the political movement of May 1968. Those lecturers who found themselves in relatively powerless and unstable positions within the university had 'entirely real interests' in participating in a movement aimed at the transformation of existing hierarchies. While in contrast: 'The violence of the reactions which were provoked, among the most traditionalist teachers in the most traditional disciplines, by the questioning of the academic institution and of the market whose monopoly it guaranteed is strictly commensurate with the dependency of their production on this market' (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 126). Secondly, Bourdieu suggests, the disciplinary subordination of the social sciences can help to explain the introduction of 'avant-garde' scientific vocabularies into the disciplines of the social sciences (p. 121).

It is in relation to this second effect that Bourdieu suggests that the career and disciplinary interests of bourgeois sociologists coincide. The security provided by a middle class background affords bourgeois entrants significant privileges within the field. These privileges arise indirectly, from the greater willingness of bourgeois students to deviate from traditional career and disciplinary paths. Bourdieu argues 'the propensity to take risks ... is a function of objective security and the confidence which that encourages' (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 109). While the offspring of petty bourgeois and

working class families tended to follow traditional routes into teaching, and aimed to achieve recognition within canonical fields of study, the offspring of the middle classes were more likely to be involved in research (ibid, note 20, p. 316), to align themselves with newer, more radical fields of study, and thus to benefit when these more fashionable fields began to displace the traditional canonical subjects (ibid, p. 126). Bourdieu concludes:

And thus we can understand the bitterness of ENS and aggregation graduates of petty-bourgeois or working class origins who have trusted in once dominant careers and positions, when they discover too late, after a series of changes as imperceptible as the intercontinental drift, that their investments will be only very partially repaid. (ibid, p. 127)

What Bourdieu's study demonstrates is that what appears as a coherent system is in fact a representation of the conflicting interests of the social agents in the field. His account foregrounds the instability of these social agents, engaged in 'permanent conflict' to maintain their position. The 'unconscious agreement', in the case of those upper middle class students pursuing a career in the expanded university, is that somehow they are entitled to the privileged opportunities enjoyed by their parents. This sense of entitlement, as well as the financial security provided by their families, determines both their political and their disciplinary activity, which in turn contribute to the restructuring of the field of the university as a whole.

Reading Bourdieu's study invites a certain amount of objectification of one's own position within the academic field. My selective, and inevitably reductive, account of Bourdieu's work foregrounds features that I can relate to my own biography. The risk I have incurred in taking four years out of a career to study for this PhD is undoubtedly supported by the security of both economic and social position provided by my professional, upper middle class parents. Indeed, the fact my career prior to beginning my PhD – a haphazard series of jobs, teaching English as a Foreign Language, temporary contracts teaching in further education colleges, and leaving my one permanent job because I objected to the culture of the institution – was similarly self-indulgent can be attributed to similar class related factors. This directionless career path is open to individuals from less privileged backgrounds than mine, but undoubtedly constitutes more of a risk for those lacking the economic, social and cultural capital

provided for me by my parents. Further, in the light of Bourdieu's analysis, I can re-interpret some of my frustration and directionless-ness as resulting from the *unexpectedness* of the difficulties I faced both in my undergraduate degree and in my later search for work. I would never have been more than inarticulately aware of a certain, unconscious, expectation of ease and status, but Bourdieu's explanation of the nature and effects of the upper middle class *habitus* does not sound unconvincing to me.

I conform to Bourdieu's description not only in terms of career path, but also in my disciplinary background. My first degree, in which I didn't do particularly well, was in philosophy. I am now training to become a sociologist. An explanation for this disciplinary move is provided by Bourdieu in his description of sociology in relation to philosophy:

Sociology: a pretentious discipline ... which situates itself at the top of the hierarchy of the sciences, thus challenging philosophy whose ambitions it claims to fulfil but with the rigour of science, is also a refuge, but a de luxe refuge allowing all those who wish to flaunt grand ambitions in theory, in politics and in political theory the maximum symbolic profit for the cheapest educational entry fee. (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 171)

As a low achieving philosophy student, it is quite plausible to suggest that I was going to have to re-position myself in order to re-enter the academic world. It is also true, to an extent, that a philosophical training will have more cache in a sociology department than in a department of philosophy. My current position, then, can be described as an attempt to make the best of both my class and my disciplinary pretensions.

Bourdieu's explanations are plausible, but they do not present the whole picture. Bourdieu's conception of *habitus* is explicitly not an objective structure, but, rather, an attempt to describe the lived, emotional attachments that are associated with the experience of such structures<sup>2</sup>. He describes *habitus* as 'a means of accounting for the

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<sup>2</sup> Bourdieu has also described *habitus* as closely related to the concept of 'ethos', (Bourdieu, 1993a p. 86), however, to conflate the concept with the idea of a limited institutional or class ethos is to miss the point of the position of *habitus* between structure and practice, as the 'infinite yet strictly limited generative capacity' that is neither representative of freedom, nor of any one system, institution or objectified structure: 'As an acquired system of generative schemes, the *habitus* makes possible the free production of all the thoughts, perceptions and actions inherent in the particular conditions of its production – and only those. Through the *habitus*, the structure of which it is the product governs practice, not along the paths of a mechanical determinism, but within the constraints and limits initially set on its interventions.

appearance of objective teleology presented by certain collectivities' (Bourdieu, 1996, n. 14, p. 311). Thus his description of the role of class factors and expectations in the production of the university field is not intended to be read as a description of the effects of deterministic class structures. However, the attempt to describe the *habitus* inevitably objectifies it, and thus the 'appearance' of objectivity is found in statistical or sociological attempts to describe the complex factors involved in the decisions and struggles of individuals:

We can hardly formulate the statistical data which reveal a pattern, without running the risk of suggesting, through the connotations of ordinary language, a mechanist or finalist philosophy of action, as if it were immanent in things themselves. (ibid, p. 147)

My own response to Bourdieu's reductive description of 'my' position - as accurate, to some extent, but also as lacking in subtlety or insight into the precise processes that I have experienced - is thus consistent with his own assessment of the risks of sociological description.

To some extent, then, this thesis can be seen as my attempt to fill in important details that I feel Bourdieu's account does not recognise. The specific details that my thesis explores in more detail than Bourdieu's study are the effects of gender regulations, institutional ethos and the internal structure of disciplinary knowledge. In order to do this I am engaged in the process of objectification, inherent in all sociological description, which, in this case, requires the conceptualisation of these three references – gender, discipline and institution – as relatively stable, relatively autonomous structures, in relation to which students position themselves when they contribute to class discussions.

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This infinite yet strictly limited generative capacity is difficult to understand only so long as one remains locked in the usual antinomies – which the concept of the *habitus* aims to transcend – of determinism and freedom, conditioning and creativity, consciousness and the unconscious, or the individual and society. Because the *habitus* is an infinite capacity for generating products – thoughts, perceptions, expressions and action – whose limits are set by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production, the conditioned and conditional freedom it provides is as remote from the creation of unpredictable novelty as it is from simple mechanical reproduction of the original conditioning.' (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 54).

#### **1.4. Institutional culture, disciplinary choices and gender: an autobiography of the question.**

I think, initially, the idea for this research was a response to my experience as an undergraduate at Oxford. I have already said that I was not very successful in my first degree. I feel as if I went to university thinking that I would begin to learn something important and left university knowing nothing. After I left, I was often slightly nervous telling people that I have a degree in philosophy, because they might expect me to know something about what various philosophers might have said, and I had no idea at all. I'm slightly better now, having done an MA and, almost, a PhD since I left, I've begun to fill in some of the gaps, but it's still worrying. What confuses me is both the fact that I didn't learn anything at university, and the fact that I did learn some things. Recently I found the essays that I wrote for my tutorials on Marxism, and they were fine. They weren't brilliant, but they apparently demonstrated some coherent knowledge of the subject. It would have amazed and delighted me to know this at the time, since none of our essays were ever marked, and I assumed, probably correctly, that few of mine were more than passable, crammed as they were with every half digested thing that I knew on that week's topic. If you had asked me about Marx's ideas immediately after I left university, or even immediately after a tutorial, I don't think I would have been able to tell you anything. And I probably knew slightly more about Marx than about most of the other things that I studied.

So, I didn't do well in my first degree. I probably wasn't bright enough and I was probably also quite lazy: I don't think I knew how to work. And in general, I am not a very good student. Even on my MA course, which I did some years later, my performance was very patchy. Nevertheless, the paradoxes, and the pain, of my undergraduate experience still confuse me. What had gone on to make me, and many other people I knew at college, both so ignorant and so unconfident? I am not going to be able to answer that specific question through my research, but my speculative explanations have informed the construction of the questions that I am investigating. There is, for example, something to do with the culture of the university and the underlying myths of the Oxford tutorial system. There is the myth that real learning must be autonomous, and that any interference in student autonomy is 'spoon-feeding'; there is the myth of equality, that the tutorial is a forum for equal debate between tutor

and student; and there is the over-riding myth of the superiority of the institution, which ensures your participation in the first two myths. These myths can be understood as legitimising disorganised and inflexible teaching methods.

The myth of the autonomy of learning legitimises the lack of any structured exposition or explanation within tutorials. In our final term, we were each invited for a five-minute meeting with the Master of our college. He asked me for my opinion of the course. I said that more guidance on the different option papers would be useful. 'You mean you want the tutors to give you the answers', the Master interrupted. 'Oh no,' I said, 'not that...' I wasn't being disingenuous. The very idea that we might expect any help in our learning was taboo. If I had admitted, even to myself, that I wanted to be *taught*, that would have been the final confirmation of my failure. What I had meant, in my comment to the Master, was only that it would be helpful to be given more, or some, information about the subjects before choosing your option papers. And that in itself felt like an admission of failure. Other people, autonomous students, presumably found out for themselves, or instinctively knew what the titles of the option papers meant. What interests me, is the extent to which it was impossible to speak outside of this illogical myth: there was no way to talk about 'guidance', or 'teaching' that did not mean, simply, 'giving you the answers'.

The second myth, the myth of equality, places disproportionate responsibility for what happens in a tutorial on the student. Peter Mirfield's account of his teaching at Oxford exemplifies this:

I distinctly recall soon after becoming a Fellow, taking a young woman who left her tutorial partner to make all the going. He had the decency to fill the silences for her when I addressed the question directly at her. So I decided to take her on her own. Ready for the task, I swore to myself that I would not let her off the hook. The question was put, and the silence began. It seemed to go on forever. Initially, I kept my nerve, but she was the stronger party, and I ended up filling the void. Afterwards, I castigated myself for my own weakness, but, I have come to think, with the passage of time, that she was the real loser. Bluntly, there are some who are unsuited to the tutorial idea, and there is nothing that can be done about it. (Mirfield, 2001, p. 38 – 39)



Amazingly, Mirfield, a fellow of the university, employed to teach Economics to this female student, does not merely describe his student as an equal, but as ‘the stronger party’ in what he appears to perceive as a battle for control of the tutorial session. The myth of equality is the myth that the student can, in two and a half days, research a new topic adequately to write an essay and then defend it in discussion with the tutor. This myth fetishises ‘innate intelligence’ and ignores the role of contextual knowledge in developing an argument. The frequent result, in my experience, is that the student is either completely silent, as in Mirfield’s example, and as such is responsible for the failure of the session, or else the student talks off the top of their head, desperate to justify their presence by demonstrating their ‘innate ability’, and so bullshits their way through the necessary hour. Both of these strategies are the last resorts of a novice required to pretend to be equal to their master.

The final myth, the myth of superiority, not only traps you into accepting the other myths, it is also used as another excuse for avoiding supporting students. When I was struggling to understand Political Theory at the beginning of my second year I finally went to my tutor to ask for help. ‘I could see you were unhappy’, my tutor said kindly, ‘but don’t worry. I do really think you are intelligent. I remember being impressed by you at your interview. If you don’t do well here, I think you will do well at some point later in your life.’ This did not offer me any re-assurance or support with my current difficulties. It appears that my tutor’s concern was not that his students might not learn but that the selection processes had been effective: that students from Balliol were indeed inherently, ‘effortlessly’, superior, to students at other institutions. Even if this superiority did not show in their academic performance. Balliol, it could be argued, is here positioned not as an educational establishment, but as a quality assurance label for a political and social elite. I would justify my label not by my academic performance while I was at college, but by my successful performance in my career after I had left.

In addition to the pedagogic myths of my university, I would also, speculatively, explain my bad undergraduate experience as something to do with my inarticulate expectation that I would begin to learn something important, which was frustrated by a curriculum dominated by analytical philosophy. I consistently felt that the texts I was required to read failed to describe the world in a way that I found illuminating or insightful. My gradual understanding of the limitations of this curriculum first initiated

my interest in disciplinary differences and the social positioning of knowledge. The particular instance I remember most clearly is when I began to wonder about the way Wittgenstein's writing contrasted with the writing of the other analytical philosophers I was studying. Wittgenstein presents his philosophy in a series of propositions that shed light on each other in ways that are left fairly open to the interpretation of the reader. His writing is thus more literary in style than that of mainstream analytical philosophers who tend to present linear arguments that, as far as possible, foreclose ambiguities of interpretation<sup>3</sup>. Wittgenstein exemplifies a break within analytical philosophy not only in his style of writing, a relatively minor point, perhaps, but also in his description of language. For me, mired in a narrow analytical philosophy course, which presented language as a transparent medium for the representation of ideas and experiences, Wittgenstein's inversion of this approach, suggesting that linguistic meanings are only produced for a specific purpose within a specific context, was liberating. What interested me, though, was not only that there were such different approaches to both writing and analysis within legitimate academic disciplines, but also why I personally should find one approach so much more persuasive than another. What other features of my existing interests, experience and social position made me so resistant to one mode of thinking and so reassured by another?

After I left university I completely avoided any intellectual engagement for several years. I returned to university to do a part-time Masters in gender and cultural studies. My experience this time was dramatically different, partly because I was also working and enjoying my job, and so did not feel overwhelmed by an idea that I needed to succeed and be original in my academic work. More importantly, though, the texts I was reading offered illuminating descriptions of issues that I felt to be important. Crucially, in relation to this thesis, this was not an accident. I had moved from a narrow philosophy curriculum that rarely moved beyond the Anglo-American analytical tradition to more explicitly critical approaches, derived in part from the work of continental philosophers whose work was not taught on my undergraduate degree. The

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<sup>3</sup> The distinction I am making between writing styles is similar to Roland Barthes' distinction between *lisable* and *scriptable* texts, or between *work* and *text*. A *scriptable* text can be described as one written 'in response to an imperative to go beyond the discovery and communication of "truth"' (Moriarty, 1991, p. 138). In defining the difference between *work* and *text*, Barthes says, '... a Theory of the Text cannot be satisfied by a metalinguistic exposition ... The theory of the text can coincide only with a practice of writing' (Barthes, 1997a, p. 164). From this perspective Wittgenstein's style of writing might be interpreted as inextricable from the argument of his philosophical investigation.

contrast in these two educational experiences clarified my scepticism about the objectivity of intellectual work and the assumption that students should be able to engage with different topics according to objective intellectual abilities, regardless of the substantive content of what they are studying. This is the origin of one of the central questions of my thesis: how do the different kinds of statements that count as legitimate knowledge within different disciplines affect educational inclusion?

One last experience that I think is relevant. During my MA in Gender Studies, I attended a class on Freud's Dora (Freud, 1905). A few years later, for various reasons, I sat in on a class on an MA in Psychoanalytic Studies, which, it turned out, was also on Freud's Dora. The reading set for both sessions was identical. What happened in the classes was not. In the session on my MA in Gender Studies, a significant part of the class was taken up with students' discussion of Freud's sexism. There was, as I remember it, comparatively little discussion of the concept of the unconscious or of the implications of the case for psychoanalysis. In the class I observed on the MA in Psychoanalytic Studies, the whole session was taken up with the teacher's relatively uncritical exposition of the set reading. The contrast between the two sessions clarified the exclusions made by the disciplines within the classroom. A student who wanted to take Freud seriously would have been marginalized in the MA Gender Studies. While a student who wanted to take a critical position on Freud would have been marginalized in the MA in Psychoanalytic Studies. Students are not necessarily aware of the exclusions or omissions they are inviting when they make choices between disciplines and institutions<sup>4</sup>.

The findings of Kim Thomas' (1990) study of gender differences in undergraduate study in English and Physics resonate, in many ways, with my overall experience as an undergraduate. She argues that for all students, the ability to take on a disciplinary identity, to fit the image of 'a scientist' or of 'an English student' has an effect on their success in their studies (ibid, p. 65). In general, taking on a disciplinary identity is more difficult for the women in her study than for the men. She compares the experience of

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<sup>4</sup> All disciplines enact these kinds of exclusions. For example, David Buckingham (1988) describes some possible interpretations of the ideologically ambiguous (i.e. sexist? and homophobic?) products made by students on a media studies course. Students choose media studies GCSE, it is implied, because they want to talk about television programmes and magazines. Then they find that they spend a lot of time talking

women as a minority within Physics departments with the experience of men as a minority on undergraduate English courses. In both cases, it was the men who found it easier to identify as a disciplinary subject:

Outsiders might see English as slightly 'effeminate': the male English student knows better, however, because there is nothing easier than for a man to be 'masculine' in a subject where women predominate and where individualism, originality and assertiveness are highly valued. The women in physics had to try to be like the men; but the men in English ... had only to show that they were different from the women – a much easier task. In English, therefore, nonconformism (part of the disciplinary identity of English students) was closely allied to masculinity. (ibid, 1990, p. 177)

Her findings make a connection between the academic discipline and interaction within teaching sessions, where the more 'masculine' attributes of 'individualism', 'originality' and 'assertiveness' are 'highly valued'. The reason I am mentioning Thomas' study here is that it identifies precisely the nebulous, uncomfortable feelings that I remember. She concludes that the experience of women, in particular, in higher education is 'confusing and contradictory' (p. 176). This conclusion does not use academic results as the criteria for educational success or failure, but is based on the way that the conflicting personal, social and academic demands on individuals affect their positioning of themselves as students of a particular discipline.

Thomas' work raises the question of why the confusion produced by these conflicting demands seems to be more evident in the accounts given by female students than in those of male students. Other recent studies in the sociology of gender and education have suggested that there is an inherent contradiction between certain forms of intellectual activity and the gender regulations to which female students are expected to conform. Rosie Walden and Valerie Walkerdine suggest that the well documented anomaly of girls under-representation in mathematics in post-compulsory schooling (Arnot, 2002, p. 184, Ernest, 1998) can be explained in terms of their need to conform to standards of femininity: 'Girls appear to be in a 'no-win', 'catch 22' situation. If they fail at mathematics they lack true intellect but are truly female. If they succeed ... they somehow become less female' (Walden and Walkerdine, 1982, p. 63). Valerie

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about gender, ethnicity, etc... and quite justifiably find ways to undermine/avoid the 'self righteous' and 'politically correct' (p. 84) disciplinary language of the course.

Walkerdine makes the more general point that anxieties expressed by the academically successful, middle class female students in her study are ‘often related to the conflicts between feminine sexuality and intellectuality’ (Walkerdine, 1998, p. 170). What Walden and Walkerdine’s account suggests is an image of the social as constituted through different discursive fields that impose different and frequently contradictory sets of criteria for success in the classroom. To succeed in the field of gender requires girls to act in ways which conflict with perceived performances of success within mathematics, and academia more generally. Walden and Walkerdine’s work thus has theoretical as well as purely empirical implications.

These studies all provide a context for my work looking at undergraduate students in contrasting disciplines. I want to describe how the conflicts and contradictions consistently observed in the educational experience of (female) students are actually enacted within undergraduate teaching sessions. How are the ‘conflicts between feminine sexuality and intellectuality’ expressed in the classroom? And are these conflicts constituted in different ways in different academic disciplines? In addition, I want to refine the theoretical framework for sociological explorations of gender and academic disciplines that is suggested in Walden and Walkerdine’s work. The thesis will draw on a Lacanian conceptual framework to define and interpret gendered positions. This framework, I believe, provides additional explanatory insights into the effects of the gender regulations on both female and male students. If, as Walden and Walkerdine suggest, failure in mathematics allows girls to be ‘truly female’, what is the effect on boys of experiencing a similar failure? The Lacanian framework, which I will set out in more detail in chapter three, provides a structure within which to understand the gendered effects of positions within the classroom.

## **1.5. The social positioning of academic disciplines**

*Homo Academicus* identifies a variety of factors that influence the social positioning of academic disciplines. As we have seen, socio-economic factors, such as the expansion in the higher education system, can act as a catalyst for changes in the relative positions of disciplines within the field of higher education. However, Bourdieu also identifies the way social factors inter-relate with the substantive content of disciplines. He describes how disciplines can be defined in terms of their relation to the existing social

order, and how this relationship is reflected in the class origins of entrants to different disciplines. *Homo Academicus* analyses correspondences between the relationship of disciplines to social and economic power and a wide variety of indicators of social and cultural capital of academics. These correspondences identify a higher correlation between disciplines such as law and medicine, which have a direct relationship to dominant social positions, and the conservative characteristics of the establishment. These conservative indicators of social and cultural capital were less evident in the disciplines with no direct relationship to external structures of power. Thus for a wide variety of indicators the same hierarchy was observed: the field of medicine had the highest proportion of academics from the dominant classes, who were privately educated, who were married, who had large families, etc., followed by law, arts, and finally by science, which had the lowest proportion of academics embodying these features of the conservative establishment in France (Bourdieu, 1996, pp. 40 – 48). These findings support a broad division of disciplines into two categories: those dependent on the temporal, social order, and those dependent on scientific, intellectual values. In the first category, academic positions are more closely correlated with social hierarchies; in the second category academic positions are more closely correlated with intellectual authority. What these findings suggest is that academic disciplines are always socially situated, firstly in terms of their object, which may or may not serve an explicit function in the maintenance of the existing social order, and following from this, in terms of their recruitment of both students and academics to carry out these contrasting social functions.

Ludwig Huber, in a survey of research into disciplinary cultures, forcefully supports Bourdieu's position. He argues that the consistency with which studies have found disciplinary differences in the social characteristics and political opinions of academics implies that disciplinary cultures cannot be explained purely in terms of the abstract intellectual characteristics of their field of knowledge (Huber, 1990, p. 244). Huber also provides his own analysis of data on students at German universities in the 1980s. His findings are very similar to Bourdieu's in relation to class based disciplinary choices:

It appears that among students from disadvantaged backgrounds, relatively more choose engineering, mathematics or natural sciences and above all social sciences, psychology or

education, while relatively fewer choose law, economics and least of all medicine ... (ibid, p. 251)

Thus it would appear that the substantive function of disciplinary knowledge beyond the realm of higher education influences subject choices, which in turn serve to reproduce existing social relations.

This understanding of the substantive basis for the social positioning of the disciplines is fundamental to my study. It supports the idea not only that disciplinary choices contribute to social reproduction, but also that individuals will enter disciplinary discussions already situated differently in relation to disciplinary ideas and modes of discussion.

Observation of the social positioning of disciplinary knowledge has, however, also been carried at other levels of analysis. While Bourdieu and Huber have observed the external relations of social groups to academic disciplines, Ken Hyland's corpus analysis of language and genres in professional academic writing (Hyland, 2000) has charted the way linguistic choices within academic writing constitute strategic social interactions within specific disciplinary communities. He argues, for example, that the numerical increase in citations in modern academic writing (ibid, p. 21) and disciplinary differences in modes of citation suggest that references to other authors are not based solely on epistemological criteria, but constitute social moves within specific disciplinary communities: 'our routine and unreflexive writing practices are deeply embedded in the epistemological and social conventions of our disciplines' (ibid, p. 40). At another level, Foucault's argument that 'there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge' (Foucault, 1977, p. 27) is consistent with Bourdieu's description of temporally dominant disciplines and their relation to power. Studies in the field of education have produced similar analyses of the way that fields of knowledge relate to fields of power, revealing how academic theories about child development and educational practice construct teachers' expectations and responses to children's behaviour in the classroom in ways that mirror the interests of dominant social groups (Walkerdine, 1990, 1998, Heath, 1983)<sup>5</sup>. My study of the social

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<sup>5</sup> It is worth noting that Shirley Brice Heath's study (1983) exemplifies a systematic account of the relationship between ethnicity and school knowledge. My research design foregrounds gender as a reference point in the analysis of in/exclusion. The reasoning behind this is explained in more detail in chapter three. However, it is a note worthy limitation of my research design and methodology that it is not

positioning of the disciplines is carried out at yet another level, exploring the effects of the object and methodology of knowledge claims within the discipline being studied, in order to describe the relationship between student in/exclusion in classroom discussions and the disciplines that they are studying.

Bourdieu's distinction between temporal and scientific disciplines provides a useful way of categorising disciplines that might be expected to be more socially exclusionary and those that might be expected to be more inclusive. The disciplines selected for my study can be categorised in accordance with Bourdieu's distinction. The distinction, to re-iterate, is between disciplines that are dependent on temporally dominant hierarchies:

knowledge in the service of order and power, aiming at the rationalization, in both senses, of the given order... (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 68).

And more autonomous, descriptive, scientific disciplines:

knowledge confronting order and power, aiming not at putting public affairs in order but at analysing them as they are (ibid, p. 69).

This second type of knowledge, Bourdieu suggests, is always implicitly critical, 'since it supposes a withholding of ordinary support for the status quo' (ibid, p. 69). Political Theory, I will argue, can be identified with the first of these categories, while American Literature can be identified with the second.

There are different ways of conceptualising the study of Political Theory, or Political Thought<sup>6</sup>. It can be described as a way of developing analytical skills and conceptual frameworks. It can also be thought of as the history of ideas, dealing with an empirical set of canonical texts. However, what distinguishes Political Theory from other

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able to distinguish systematically between the strategies and experiences of students with different ethnic backgrounds.

<sup>6</sup> I use these two terms interchangeably throughout the thesis. It is possible to distinguish between different approaches to the study of Political Thought: Political Theory, as opposed to the History of Political Thought, as opposed to Political Philosophy. However, within the introductory undergraduate courses that I have looked at, such distinctions are not consistent enough to have been relevant to my study. Where, in specific instances, differences in approach are relevant, I will explain within those specific interpretations. For a more detailed account of the different approaches to political theory, see Held, 1991.



analytical and historical disciplines is its fundamental relationship to issues of government:

Political philosophy asks how the state should act, what moral principles should govern the way it treats its citizens and what kind of social order it should seek to create. (Swift, 2001, p. 5)

Political theory, then, does not set out to describe the state, or the political system, but rather to justify it. This way of understanding Political Theory, or Political Philosophy, positions it clearly within the category of temporal disciplines, serving to rationalise governmental activity. While Political Theory has a less explicit and, perhaps, less essential role than law or medicine, in contributing to the maintenance of the state, it does see itself as clarifying the conceptual basis on which politicians may justify their actions. The subtitle to Adam Swift's introduction to political philosophy, 'A beginners' guide for students and politicians', re-affirms this understanding of the discipline as applied knowledge for the use of those in positions of power. Following Bourdieu's analysis, then, we might expect to find more interest in the field of political theory from students from the dominant classes. The study of political theory may not lead as directly into structurally dominant positions as the study of law or medicine, but it nevertheless carries with it associations of government and power that are more likely to be instinctively understood by those with some relation to similarly powerful positions. As David Held suggests:

Those who have most interest in political life and who regard it most favourably are those closest to power and privilege. (Held, 1991, p. 3)

My hypothesis, in setting up this study, was that differences in students' position in relation to power and authority might affect their mode of interaction with political theory as a discipline.

There is more variety in, or dispute between, conceptions of literary criticism than conceptions of Political Thought. The main opposition within literary studies can be characterised as that between New Criticism and the multi-methodological, historicist or cultural studies approaches prevalent today. The approaches of New Criticism prioritise close readings of texts and scholarly knowledge of the canon. These approaches can be

seen to fit into Bourdieu's category of disciplines that serve the interests of power, in so far as they treat literary texts as aesthetic objects with inherent moral value, and knowledge of canonical texts is seen as enhancing understanding of the world and therefore the legitimacy of individuals within dominant positions<sup>7</sup>. This conceptualisation of literary analysis, emphasising the aesthetic and moral value inhering in individual works, can be opposed to historicist readings, which foreground political interpretations of literary texts. A broad definition of historicist approaches incorporates Marxist and feminist readings, and readings which prioritise issues of ethnicity and racism. These readings draw on sociological, psychoanalytic and political theory, and tend to attach greater significance to the unconscious role of language in ideological reproduction than to its aesthetic and moral value. These approaches, in attempting to describe the ideological production and effects of literary texts, come within Bourdieu's second category: disciplines that do not have a function in supporting the status quo, but which, in their production of descriptions of the existing social order, are implicitly politicised and critical. The American Literature courses in my study are situated within this school of literary studies, and thus present a contrast, within Bourdieu's categories, to the Political Theory courses.

The aim of my study is to explore the effects of the differential social positioning of disciplines on students within the classroom. I want to use another brief biographical example to suggest the nature of these effects on individual students. The Oxford English degree in the 1980s, when I was an undergraduate, was extremely 'traditional', structured as an objective historical survey of the canon of English Literature. There were no options to study women's literature or colonial literature, and emphasis was placed on the analysis of text as text, rather than on text as a historical document, or as representative of a cultural or ideological position. This approach to literary studies can be associated with teaching methods which demand an unmediated response to a literary text, since historical or biographical research is not considered necessary. Without external sources of research, greater emphasis is placed on the ability of the student to produce their own 'original' response to a text. So there is a correlation between the discipline and the features of 'individualism', 'assertiveness', and 'originality' that were described by Kim Thomas as a masculine style of classroom interaction. My friend

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<sup>7</sup> For characterisations of New Criticism, see Colebrook, 1997, p. 222, or Culler, 1997, p. 122. For a more

Charlotte, who studied English at Oxford during this period, has described both her continuing feelings of inadequacy in terms of literary knowledge, because she was never required to provide any context for her interpretations of texts, and also her lack of confidence in her performance in tutorials. She has also described how she used to plagiarise other critics, because she was continually attacked in tutorials for being unoriginal:

... I was never accused of plagiarism – I just know that I committed it but I would say that it was partly because I felt deeply unconfident of my own opinions in that very masculine environment ... I never felt I had enough time and space to formulate them and I was amazed at the confidence of my male peers and the seeming readiness of their opinion making. Our tutor was very fond of instant literary criticism – I remember a particularly dire seminar on a particularly opaque Auden poem in which we were all supposed to instantly voice our opinions and I went into a complete panic and could think nothing. Yet the first time I had a female tutor I felt completely freed to express myself, and I remember my end of term report where she said it was a joy to have a student so full of her own ideas. I felt with her that I could present an argument - this is what several critics have said in the past, and the conclusions that I draw are these... (Charlotte Jones, personal e-mail, 1993)

Charlotte's account is consistent with a practice of literary criticism that is dependent, both in content and in style of articulation, on pre-existing patriarchal power structures. The tutor's prioritisation of 'instant literary criticism' over the analysis of 'what critics have said in the past', combined with the greater confidence demonstrated by her male peers acted to marginalise Charlotte in tutorials. Her experience provides a useful example because she is, in many ways, the exemplar of a successful Oxford undergraduate: she got a double first in English, was very active in student theatre, and has gone on to become a successful playwright. However, she is still unconfident of her academic abilities and, as is clear from her e-mail, has very ambiguous, largely negative feelings about her university experience. This example does not provide adequate evidence, but it does seem to me to suggest some relationship between the position of the discipline within the temporally dominant patriarchal establishment and the discomfort felt by students like Charlotte, and also, perhaps, some of the female students in Kim Thomas' study.

Recent studies in other disciplinary areas have identified the effects of the critical, or scientific disciplines on student inclusion. Lindahl Elliot's research into a Science, Culture and Communications degree identifies a conflict between the two sections of the course (Lindahl Elliot, 1997). He demonstrates that the course as a whole was 'ambiguous, if not contradictory, where its orientation to the market was concerned' (ibid, p. 135). While modules in the science faculty taught students to understand science, modules in the media faculty taught students to be critical of standard representations of science in the media. Students frequently failed to understand this difference in approach, and were confused when the media modules did not seem to be training them in the marketable skills they would need to gain employment in science communication (ibid, p. 178). In a different field, similar problems have been encountered by teachers of women's studies committed to feminist pedagogies, when students resist identification with discourses that put into question their position in the dominant order (Elliot, P, 1997, Middleton, 1982, p. 9, Roman and Eyre, 1997). It would not seem right, therefore, to suggest, that the disciplines of the establishment are necessarily more exclusionary than the newer, explicitly politicised and critical disciplines. What I hope to do is to provide a more precise account of the way students are positioned, or position themselves, in relation to both categories of disciplines.

### **1.6. The conceptual gaps in Bourdieu's account: Bernstein's pedagogic codes.**

Bourdieu's description of the field of the university provides a framework within which to conceptualise the relationships between academic disciplines, class and institutional position. These relationships, within his framework, are defined not only in terms of a hierarchy of administrative posts or academic achievements, but, more importantly, through the ability to define what counts as legitimate knowledge. Thus those who, as a result of a combination of social and historical factors, are able to persuade their colleagues and prospective students of the legitimacy of their own specialism are simultaneously able to secure their position within the institution. In *Homo Academicus*, Bourdieu prioritises the influence of social or class factors, over the object and methodology of the discipline, as a factor in achieving control over definitions of knowledge. Similarly, his other studies of the distribution of cultural capital (1986, 1993) are intended to demonstrate that middle class knowledge has a higher exchange

value than working class knowledge. As presented in his analysis, the value of disciplinary or cultural knowledge does not inhere in the form of knowledge itself, but is determined through the external interests of agents in the field of exchange. Middle class values control these fields not because of any inherent features, but because the middle classes dominate the processes of symbolic production through which value is attributed to different objects. His research, then, does not address the internal structure of knowledge, and how that internal structure might play a role in the exercise of power.

It is at this point that Bernstein identifies the limitation, or gap, in Bourdieu's framework, arguing that the social factors described by Bourdieu are not sufficient to explain changes in the social position of different types of knowledge:

... the increase in numbers, the rituals of the generations, the new habituses are the resources, perhaps the necessary conditions but not the sufficient conditions to explain *changes in languages*. (Bernstein 1996, p. 166, see also *ibid*, p. 4)

The gap that Bernstein identifies in Bourdieu's framework is the lack of a language to describe the way that the internal structure of units of cultural capital, particularly educational knowledge, itself exercises control over the social field. The point of Bernstein's work in this area is to suggest a relationship between features of the internal structure of knowledge and the social relations in which they are likely to be realised. For example, he describes how the strength of boundaries between areas of disciplinary knowledge relates to organisational structures, and how this relationship will always serve the interests of one social group over another. The divisions between specialisms within a school or a hospital, for example, will influence/be influenced by the organisation of departments, and different organisational structures will serve the interests of either nurses or doctors, staff or patients, middle class or working class students. In this example, it is the strength of the boundary between fields of knowledge that constitutes the key feature of the internal structure of knowledge, the pedagogic code. This exposition of pedagogic codes, which constitute the relationship between the internal structure of knowledge and social organisation, is re-iterated throughout Bernstein's work. Most pertinent to my study is his description of the features of different forms of abstract knowledge as hierarchical and horizontal knowledge structures.

Hierarchical and horizontal knowledge structures are the terms used by Bernstein to describe the pedagogic codes that contribute to the production of fields of abstract, or academic, knowledge. They offer us a conceptual vocabulary to fill in the gaps left in Bourdieu's account of the social positioning of the disciplines. Hierarchical knowledge structures, according to Bernstein's definition, 'appear by their users to be motivated towards greater and greater integrating propositions, operating at more and more abstract levels'. In contrast, rather than developing towards one all encompassing theory, horizontal knowledge structures 'consist of a series of specialised languages' (Bernstein, 1996, p. 161). Bernstein offers Physics as an example of a hierarchical knowledge structure,<sup>8</sup> while Sociology, Literature and Philosophy are offered as examples of horizontal knowledge structures, each of which consists of variety of different languages or theoretical approaches. The different knowledge structures, Bernstein suggests, produce different relationships between students of academic disciplines and the social field. He argues that horizontal knowledge structures are more susceptible than hierarchical structures to influence by external social factors:

Because a *Horizontal Knowledge Structure* consists of an array of languages any one transmission necessarily entails some selection, and some privileging within the set recontextualised for the transmission of the *Horizontal Knowledge Structure*. The social basis of the principle of this recontextualising indicates whose 'social' is speaking. The social basis of the principle of the recontextualising constructs the perspective of the *Horizontal Knowledge Structure* ... I say that this principle is social to indicate that choice here is not rational in the sense that it is based on the 'truth' of one of the specialised languages. ... The dominant perspective within any transmission may be a function of the power relations among the teachers, or of pressure from groups of acquirers, or, particularly today, a function of indirect and direct external pressures of the market or the state itself. (ibid, p. 164)

The suggestion that the recontextualisation of the discipline that takes place in any act of transmission necessarily entails a process of selection is plausible. Similarly, the suggestion that the basis of this selection in the transmission of horizontal knowledge structures must be conceived of as social, rather than as based purely on abstract

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<sup>8</sup> It is not clear from Bernstein's own work whether Physics in fact conforms to his description of a hierarchical knowledge structure. It may indeed be the case that all disciplines are in fact horizontal knowledge structures, and that Bernstein's categories should be considered as end points on a continuum, rather than as mutually exclusive alternatives. There is clearly a need for further empirical investigation.

academic grounds is also convincing. Thus, it would seem reasonable to assume that this process of selection must be in the interests of a specific social group and that the ability to identify with this group is a part of what participants must acquire to enter the discipline, within the specific context of transmission.

Both American Literature and Political Thought can be described as examples of Horizontal Knowledge Structures. However, while within Political Thought the different specialised languages – for example of Liberalism, Marxism, Libertarianism – are generally segmentally transmitted, as Bernstein's model suggests, American Literature's explicit adoption of multiple methodologies does not conform so precisely. The explicit application of multiple methodologies in American Literature means that the selection process inherent in transmission is far less significant than Bernstein's model suggests. One might expect, then, that in American Literature there may be less pressure on participants to conform to one particular disciplinary perspective. Looked at in this way, my study might, in part, be described as an attempt to develop and refine Bernstein's conceptual language. While I do not use Bernstein's conceptual language in my analysis, it is clear that the object I am looking at is very close to that which his language describes: the social effects of the internal structure of forms of educational knowledge. One reason I do not take up his conceptual language is that there are important aspects of, particularly, the analysis of gender and subjectivity, which cannot be incorporated productively within his framework.

However, aspects of Bernstein's work have been used productively in the analysis of gender and education (Arnot, 2002, Middleton, 1982, Sadovnik, 1995). Sue Middleton applies Bernstein's distinction between integrated code, which involves the 'subordination of previously insulated subjects or courses to some relational idea' (Bernstein, quoted in Middleton, p. 3.), and collection code, which maintains strong institutional boundaries between existing categories of knowledge, in her analysis of a women's studies programme. She argues that feminism acted as a 'relational idea' that brought together individuals from different, 'previously insulated', departments within the university to develop both new courses and, concurrently, new ways of thinking. This integration, she argues, was further facilitated by the position of women as a minority on the academic staff at the university, which gave them an additional reason to join together socially and politically as well as in a purely academic context (p. 11).

However, Middleton suggests, the conflict between new integrated forms of knowledge and the existing, collection code, departmental structure of the university had a negative impact of the developing status of women's studies. She concludes that it is possible to identify a relationship between 'the lower status of integrated code' and 'the devaluation of the qualities characterised as "feminine" in our patriarchal society', (p. 14) but that it is nevertheless important to explore 'the radical possibilities of integrated codes'. Middleton's precise analysis, then, identifies a relationship between the specific historical position of women and the possibility of institutionalising an integrated code in a way that neither essentialises the gendered connotations of integrated approaches nor prejudges the outcomes of such disciplinary innovations. Bernstein's concepts thus facilitate the clarification of the connection between the position of women and forms of knowledge, without providing specific insights into the definition of the 'feminine', which is taken as a given in Middleton's analysis.

Other recent developments of Bernstein's work address similar issues to those addressed in Middleton's work – i.e. the development of new forms of knowledge within the university – but attempt to transform Bernstein's descriptive categories to incorporate epistemological, as well as purely sociological distinctions. This seems to me to be a dangerous step for the sociology of knowledge, and these accounts frequently conflate valid criticisms of radical pedagogies and of some of the claims made by researchers regarding the inclusionary effects of their work, with seemingly imprecise and un-validated descriptions of whole fields of academic research and writing (Bernstein, 1996, Moore and Muller, 1999, Maton, 2000). Maton, for example, in his analysis of the position of cultural studies within the university, constructs an interesting distinction between categories of knowledge which prioritise 'procedures appropriate to a discrete object of study', and categories of knowledge which prioritise the 'personal characteristics of the author or subject' (Maton, 2000, p. 155). However, he appears to base his distinction on an analysis of the claims made by authors in general descriptions of their discipline and its aims, rather than on an analysis of the work itself, and thus fails to identify any actual examples which demonstrate that cultural studies does indeed prioritise 'personal characteristics of the author or subject', and if so, that this prioritisation is not at the same time also a 'procedure appropriate to the discrete object of study'. Bernstein's own discussion of new disciplinary areas associated with cultural studies is even more blatantly based on what might appear to be



an ill-researched caricature. He argues that one result of equity driven moves to recognise diversity in education has been the 'colonisation' of 'vertical', abstracted or academic discourses by 'horizontal', or everyday, discourses. However, he bases this argument on a description of some of these newer disciplinary areas as 'the confessional narratives of a variety of Feminist and Black Studies in higher education' (Bernstein, 1996, p. 170). Such descriptions seem to be based on prior epistemological commitments rather than on sociological description, and do not help us to understand how, if at all, the 'newer' disciplines affect educational inclusion.

Madeline Arnot provides a more sympathetic interpretation of Bernstein's description of 'the confessional narratives of Feminist and Black Studies in higher education'. She interprets him as suggesting that 'feminist knowledge structures may not necessarily be liberatory if they are limited to such epistemologically weak horizontal knowledge forms' (Arnot, 2002, p. 241). It is possible that Bernstein's comment was intended as strategic advice rather than epistemological criticism: however, the validity of his advice would still need to be backed up with empirical evidence that the knowledge structures of 'Feminist and Black studies' do indeed conform to his description, and that they are not achieving their intended political effects. While Bernstein's categories of vertical and horizontal discourses may be universal to the extent that they can be used to categorise any form of knowledge, the universality of the social effects or influence of these different forms of knowledge, as Middleton rightly maintains, is not self evident<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> It is, perhaps, worth briefly exploring this citation as an example of the social positioning of disciplinary writing (see the reference to Hyland in the previous section in this chapter). Firstly, the value of this type of reference to another's opinion, simply to make one's own opinion sound more plausible, is clearly questionable, though common in some disciplines. Hyland (2000) for example, notes how 'in the absence of an actual counter argument, philosophers may strengthen their position by inventing one and attributing it with a hypothetical citation' (p. 36), such as 'Wittgenstein would argue...' or 'Descartes might suggest...'. The addition of the reference to another author, real or imaginary, signals, or constructs, academic and social allegiances over and above the strictly intellectual requirements of the argument. Secondly, a closer analysis of the specific choice of citational vocabulary in my reference to Middleton in the main text reveals precisely this type of strategic social function. In particular, the use of 'maintains', which although just about defensible, is probably too strong in this instance. 'Implies' would probably be more accurate, since this is not an argument that Middleton articulates explicitly, it is more an implication I am reading into her suggestion that we should explore the radical possibilities of integrated code. Clearly, the rhetorical effect of 'maintains' is more pleasing, and implies more explicit support for my position. However, the point I am making is not one that should be reliant on the agreement of other people, and so the use of the reference would appear to be a move more in conformity with the social conventions of this type of writing than with the needs of the argument.

What Bernstein's knowledge codes cannot do is to predict the interaction between forms of knowledge and other historically situated discursive fields. By separating out the discursive fields of gender, institutional cultures and disciplines within my analysis I hope to give some sense of the interaction between different fields that can overdetermine specific social effects. This separation is important to enable the identification of the relative autonomy of different discursive fields, and to avoid essentialising one form of knowledge as necessarily better, or more politically effective, than another.

The final point I want to take from Bernstein's work relates to the difficulty of identifying the social effects of forms of knowledge. It is difficult to identify whose interest is being served by a particular knowledge structure because knowledge is always presented as objective and coherent. Bernstein says:

... externally, the classificatory principle creates order, and the contradictions, cleavages and dilemmas which necessarily inhere in the principle of a classification are suppressed by the insulation. Within the individual the insulation becomes a system of psychic defences against the possibility of a weakening of the insulation, which would then reveal the suppressed contradictions, cleavages and dilemmas. So the internal reality of insulation is a system of psychic defences to maintain the integrity of a category. (Bernstein, 1996, p. 7)

What Bernstein suggests here, but does not develop, is the psychic level to the structuring of knowledge. As Bernstein constantly re-iterates, different forms of knowledge serve the interests of different social groups, but it is this aspect of knowledge that is repressed. Bernstein's approach is to reveal these repressed interests by looking at the relationship between disciplinary, organisational and pedagogic structures. In doing this, he is able to construct his argument without incorporating the 'suppressed contradictions, cleavages and dilemmas' into his theoretical system. As I have said, I am looking at a very similar object to Bernstein. However, my empirical study does not look directly at the level of organisational structures. I am hoping to reveal some aspects of organisational structures indirectly, by looking at the types of claims made in classroom interventions. In order to relate the internal structure of these claims to the construction of social positions in classroom interactions, I will draw on some psychoanalytic approaches to the analysis of talk, which I will introduce in the

chapter three. In doing this, I hope, to a very limited extent, to incorporate the psychic level described by Bernstein into my analytical framework.

### **1.7. A description of access oriented vs selective universities.**

Within this study, the institutions function as settings, or contexts, which are realised in relation to the other discursive fields of discipline and gender, and in relation to which student positions must be negotiated. The analysis does not look directly at organisational structures, and 'institution' is the least conceptually developed of the three axes of my analysis. Different aspects of the institutional settings are foregrounded at different points in the analysis, but no overall conceptualisation is developed. Instead, the institutions are used as signifiers of cohort, class and academic orientation: factors which cannot be ignored, and in relation to which valid, if strictly limited, assumptions can be made on the basis of the contrast between institutions at the top and bottom end of the UK higher education market place.

The contrasts between pre- and post- 1992, highly selective and access oriented universities, are easy to caricature. The 'pre' universities teach more of the traditional disciplines, have more full-time students and more traditional assessment methods (exams instead of or as well as coursework), they are less flexible in their teaching methods and course structure, they have fewer mature students, fewer students from working class and minority ethnic backgrounds, and fewer students with non-traditional or no academic qualifications on entry. The ethos of these universities is conservative: they value scholarship and high academic standards. In contrast, the 'post' universities teach more applied, vocational, inter- and multi-disciplinary courses, they have flexible modes of study, modular courses, assess more through course work than by examination, and they make provision for part time students and students without the 'traditional' entry qualifications. These universities have a radical educational agenda and value social change over scholarship and standards. In the 'pre' universities, widening participation means identifying and offering a place to exceptional students from 'non-traditional' backgrounds. In the 'post' universities, widening participation

means offering a place to any student who fulfils the minimum criteria necessary to suggest that they will be able to complete the course.<sup>10</sup>

There is occasional truth to these caricatures. However, it has also been argued, quite convincingly, that the overall system of higher education in the UK is still dominated by the traditions and standards of its elitist origins (Tight, 1989, Fulton and Ellwood, 1989, Trow, 1981)<sup>11</sup>. My own study adds to existing evidence that a simplistic opposition between the ideologies of the 'pre-' and 'post-' 1992 institutions is inadequate. A head of department at one of the 'post-' universities in my study described the new tutorial system they were introducing as 'Oxbridge' style. In fact, the tutorial system he was describing was intended to give students support in academic skills and essay writing, and so they are not really 'Oxbridge' style at all, but the fact that he chose to describe them in that way reveals the continuing influence of the selective system on the less-selective sector<sup>12</sup>. The caricatured divide between the two opposing sectors was also breached in the rationales given for their assessment methods by two tutors I talked in my study. Another tutor at a post-1992 university explained the assignments set for his module, summaries plus an essay, as ensuring that the students covered 'breadth and depth', i.e. in terms of product. A tutor at a pre 1992 university explained a similar variety of assessment methods on his course as a way of supporting students' development of academic writing skills. The timing of the assessment tasks on the two courses reflects the tutors different rationales: at the post 1992 university, the tasks were all due in at the end of the module, while at the pre 1992 university the tasks were staged throughout the module, with feedback provided on the first task before the next

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<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Pratt, 1997, p. 9 – 12, for a similar characterisation of the 'two traditions'.

<sup>11</sup> Martin Trow (1981) contrasts the higher education system in the United States with that in the UK. He characterises the UK system as 'high standards and constrained access' and the US system as 'easy access and problematic achievement'. He bases this distinction on two main features of each system. The features common across the UK higher education sector are the essentialising of the need to provide products that conform to a common, 'gold' standard and the high staff student ratios. In the US, the key features are the long- term commitment to increasing access to higher education for all groups and the tradition of liberal, non-specialised, credit based system at university level. What this comparison reveals is the extent to which the contrasting institutions within the UK higher education sector share a common ideology, and one that is probably far closer to traditional elite conception of the university than the widely espoused 'access' model.

<sup>12</sup> I should add that this example could be used to make precisely the opposite point. The head of department who made this comment was new in post and had left, reputedly having failed to fit in to the ethos of the department, before I completed my fieldwork. Perhaps it would be more appropriate to read his comment not as a reflection of the ideology of the institution, but as a reflection of the fact that he did not conform to the ideology of the institution. But, nevertheless, he was head of department at the time...

was due. These examples verify the very obvious dangers in assuming representativeness, especially in a study as small scale as mine.

The detail of possible comparisons between the policy, curricula and teaching methods in 'old' and 'new' universities, however, is not relevant to my study. My use of contrasting institutions is not intended to produce results that are representative of those institutions. Rather, the institutions in my study were chosen with the aim of providing certain significant contrasts between the classes that I observed.

The specific areas of contrast I was looking for were in ethos and student body, and recent studies suggest that there is strong case to be made for saying that these two features of an institution are closely inter-related (Ball et al, 2002, Reay et al, 2001. Robbins, 1991, p. 6). Ball et al argue that:

... choice of university is a choice of lifestyle and a matter of 'taste' and further that social class is an important aspect of these subtexts of choice. (Ball et al, 2002, p. 53)

This implies that what I have called 'ethos' is a factor in student choice, and so in the make up of the student body of an institution. Ball et al's research suggests that to interpret 'lifestyle' as correlating in a direct way with social class and ethnicity is too simplistic. There *is* a correlation: a higher proportion of students at the post-1992 universities are from working class and minority ethnic backgrounds than at the pre-1992 universities<sup>13</sup>. This is in part a result of pragmatic choices: material and time constraints that are met by studying part-time and/or close to home. However, it is also a result of other less concrete factors. Reay et al., describing the choices of the students in the same study as Ball et al, say:

The importance of choosing somewhere where one feels safe and/or happy raises the issue of risk in relation to university choice. Most of the students are applying to low risk universities where if they are from an ethnic minority there is an ethnic mix, if they are privileged they will find intellectual and social peers, and if they are mature students there is a high percentage of mature students. ( Reay et al, 2001, p. 865)

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<sup>13</sup> Ball et al, 2002, p. 54, ' In our own work, using multiple regression analysis, social class was found to be the main predictor of the schools attended and GCSE attainment of the students in our sample, which were in turn the main predictors of choosing high status universities.' See also, Pratt, 1997, p.78/ch. 3.

These explanations of their choices of university, Reay et al. suggest, tended to be more explicit in the accounts given by 'non-traditional' higher education students. Several of the sample expressed discomfort at the idea of attending high status institutions such as London University, Oxford or Cambridge, and those who had visited these places appeared less than enthusiastic about what they had seen there: 'too traditional', 'too old fashioned', 'a complete shock', 'pompous', 'stuck up', 'a hard place to be if you're black, even if you're rich' (Reay et al, 2001, p. 870). This self-stratification is not only a function of familiarity. It is also related to class-based knowledge about the implications of the choices being made: middle class students were far more likely to be aware of the gradations in status of different institutions and of how these gradations would be read in the job market after leaving university (Ball et al, 2002, p. 60). It is where students from other social groups are more aware of these gradations that the complexity of the correlation between ethos and student body is revealed. Reay et al suggest the different implications in apparently similar judgments made by students of different class backgrounds:

... the feeling that universities like Middlesex are not good enough signifies very differently for working-class Candice and Julia than it does for middle-class Keeval. The middle class students are not implicating themselves when they talk about avoiding the new universities... (Reay et al, 2001, p. 868).

Where the choices of middle class white students were relatively unreflexive and going to university was likely to be seen as automatic, simply doing what it has always been assumed that you would do, the choices of students from working class and ethnic minority backgrounds can be interpreted as a relatively explicit and reflexive re-positioning either with or against their current social group. It is worth noting that Reay et al's description of the repositioning students have to manoeuvre in relation to their choice of university is not dissimilar to Thomas' description of the difficulties some students experience in positioning themselves in relation to their discipline.

It is not necessary to the point I need to make here to spend more time discussing features of the different types of university. The argument that forms the basis on which the sites for my data collection were chosen is that it is reasonable to expect to

find a different composition of student body and a different institutional ethos in universities selected from the two extremes of our higher educational system and with contrasting positions in relation to selection and educational inclusion. It is also reasonable to expect that these differences will have an influence on the kinds of talk that dominate classroom discussions, on who can speak and what can be said. As such, the institutions themselves while not the direct focus of my study, provide an appropriate context for my examination of disciplinary discourses and classroom interaction.

## **1.8. Conclusions**

This chapter has set out a range of concepts on which I am drawing at different levels of analysis within the thesis. At the most abstracted level, the analysis will attempt to illustrate the overdetermination of student positions within undergraduate classrooms. It will describe the interaction between the discursive fields of gender, discipline and institution, within the four contexts that comprise the study, and the effects of this interaction in either fixing or destabilising aspects of each of these fields, in relation to which student positions can coherently be constructed. At more concrete levels of analysis, the thesis will provide an account of academic disciplines, gender relations, and higher education institutions which both draws on and refines the conceptual structures set out in this chapter.

Bourdieu's analysis of the field of higher education in France provides an account of the multiple ways in which academic disciplines are embedded in the social. His analysis of the development of new disciplinary fields, the expansion in student numbers, and the application of disciplinary knowledge in the wider social field, reveals the multiple and inextricable relationships between social and intellectual activity. This general understanding of the interdependence between the intellectual and the social forms the basis of this study. However, the specific concepts taken from Bourdieu that this study will explore in more detail are the precise nature of Political Thought, as an example of a discipline that can be applied in the service of the dominant social order, in contrast to American Literature, as an example of a descriptive, critical discipline. While Bourdieu has analysed the relationship between social class and subject choice in relation to these

two categories of knowledge, my study aims to develop an account of the disciplines that incorporates both their internal structure and methodology and an understanding of their relation to, or constitution as both gendered and institutional discursive practices.

As I have suggested, in addition to his persuasive presentation of the general case for the importance of the internal structure of knowledge in the constitution of social relations, Bernstein's categories of hierarchical and horizontal knowledge structures inform my analysis of the transmission of the two disciplines in my study. American Literature and Political Thought provide examples of very different instantiations of horizontal knowledge structures. The analysis of the disciplines within this study thus constitutes an empirical example that provides evidence for the refinement of Bernstein's categories, and in the chapter six I will summarise the form that such a refinement might take.

I am also drawing on previous studies of the relationship between academic disciplines and gender. The case has already been made for the existence of a conflict, or contradiction, between academic discourse and the production of hegemonic femininities. This study aims to refine the accounts provided in these previous works, in order to develop a more precise understanding of the relationship between hegemonic femininities and the specific disciplinary contexts of undergraduate classes in American Literature and Political Thought. To describe this relationship, the study draws on Lacanian definitions of the masculine and the feminine as contrasting positions in relation to language and the symbolic order. This conception of gender is explained in more detail in chapter three. It is also intended that by conceptualising the relationship between academic disciplines, gender, and higher education institutions within the context of the theoretical formulations of overdetermination and antagonism that I have outlined, a more unified picture of the interaction between these different discursive fields might be developed.

The thesis is structured in the following way. Chapters two and three present the methods of data collection and the framework for analysis, and also attempt to suggest the limits of both of these processes of objectification. The analysis of the material is divided into three chapters. The first constitutes an account of the way academic disciplines are constituted at the margins of classroom activity, and describes the way



three individual students might be seen as constituting these margins. The second data analysis chapter describes less marginal positions within the Political Thought classes, and reveals some ways in which these 'included' positions re-iterate existing social relations of both class and gender. The final data analysis chapter describes the American Literature classes, and suggests that some contrasts between the positions available to students in these classes and those available in the Political Thought classes are related to specific features of the content and structure of the discipline. These points are then drawn together in a concluding chapter.

# **THE UNSTABLE BOUNDARIES OF THE EMPIRICAL OBJECT: CASE STUDY, INTERVIEWS, PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION AND THE ETHICS OF RESEARCH**

### **2.1. The paradox of (comparative case study) research.**

There is a constant paradox in sociological research: the aim is to fix meanings, at the same time as maintaining a sense of the limits and fragility of the processes of production of those meanings<sup>1</sup>. In this chapter I want to make a case for the validity of my research design, while at the same time constantly noting its inherent difficulties and limitations. The data collection took place on four sites, and was designed to allow a comparison across both disciplines and settings, in order to develop an understanding of the positions available to students in relation to socially positioned academic disciplines and institutions. In order to reveal the way student positions are dependent on social class, the design includes a comparison of institutions that may be expected to embody contrasting student groups and educational ethos. However, the distinctions between institutions are not homogenous and because of this the comparative positions of the two Politics departments are not exactly the same as the comparative positions of the two English departments in the study. Thus comparisons across the disciplines must take into account these institutional differences, which may limit the extent to which observations can be attributed to disciplinary differences alone. The study also explores differences in the structure of disciplinary knowledge. However, the identity of the disciplines is not fixed, and is instantiated differently in the different settings. This chapter will make the case for considering the modules selected to be the object of study as similar objects, at the same time as indicating some of the distinctions between them. In addition, the precise nature of my participation in the classes that I observed and in the interviews varies according to both discipline and the institutional setting, and this variation must be accounted for in the analysis. All of these instabilities in the empirical

object and methods are inherent to a comparative case study research design. By identifying some of the limitations on the possibility of making comparisons across settings I hope to suggest that the analysis presented in the later chapters, also, does not ignore them.

I use the term 'case study' with some hesitancy, since I think the term reveals fairly little about the nature of any individual piece of research. It seems plausible that, as Andrew Brown and Paul Dowling have commented, there is 'no such thing as "the case study approach" other than as constituted by the curricularizing of research methods' (Brown and Dowling, 1998, p. 167). However, some consideration of the broad implications of what it means to describe and analyse specific instances, or 'cases', may be useful in explaining the processes of sampling and data collection within my research. There are contrasting definitions of the meaning of 'case study'. Robert Stake, for example, suggests a distinction between 'intrinsic' and 'instrumental' case studies. 'What we may call *intrinsic case study*', he argues, 'is undertaken because one wants a better understanding of this particular case' (Stake, 1994, p. 237). Deacon et al, in contrast, say that to describe a piece of research as case study necessarily 'suggests it is an instance of some broader phenomenon' (Deacon et al, 1999, p. 366). In relation to issues of sampling, the notion of 'intrinsic' case study is attractive, since it evaporates the problem: if you only want an understanding of the particular case then you do not need to demonstrate that the example you have selected has any generalisable features. However, at the same time this would evaporate any possible contribution to meaningful, or transferable, knowledge. The idea that we do in some sense want the 'case' to provide insights that go beyond the specific instance appears to me to be essential to a meaningful conception of research. The problem we encounter in the detailed study of one or more cases is the mass of variables that threaten to confound either the validity or the generaliseability of our interpretations. In my study, for example, gender, discipline and institution constitute the main reference points that structure my interpretation of classroom interaction. I do not consistently factor in, for example, the age and experience of individual tutors, which may, in some instances, provide an alternative or additional valid interpretation. However, the attempt to take account of all variables in each interpretation would undermine the possibility of the

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<sup>1</sup> It is in relation to this paradox that Bourdieu suggests that the writing of sociology should always aim at

study producing knowledge that can be applied beyond the case itself. The researcher's responsibility is thus to construct a theoretical framework that provides a solid basis both for interpreting the data and for moving beyond it<sup>2</sup>. I present the main features of my interpretive framework in the next chapter. However, no matter how well articulated and coherent such a framework may be, the idiosyncrasies of the cases being researched inevitably provoke stomach churning moments of doubt<sup>3</sup>.

To quell these doubts, I try to remind myself that this research does not make any claims about the wider application of specific interpretations of classroom interaction within the analysis, but rather suggests that the method of interpretation illustrated here provides a plausible and insightful perspective on classroom interaction more generally. However, despite all of this hedging, this chapter does argue that the design of the research enables comparisons to be made across the settings that constitute the empirical object of study with a reasonable level of reliability and validity<sup>4</sup>.

## **2.2. Selection within comparative case study research.**

The problems with generalisation in relation to case study research are inescapable in the process of selecting both sites and, for example, interview participants within those sites. The available codifications of sampling strategies (see, for example, Wengraf, 2001, p. 102 – 103) do not provide illuminatingly precise ways of thinking about the process of sampling within my research. According to these categories, my sampling of both settings and interviewees were to an extent opportunistic, and to an extent theory based. Theory based sampling, though, is a very vague category, perhaps best described simply as 'a reasoned process rather than a statistical formula' (Wallace et al, 1998, p. 90). An even less specific guide to sampling within case study research is to aim for balance, variety and an opportunity to learn (Stake, 1994, p. 244). There is some purpose to the citation of this relatively vague advice, since it is plausibly the case that

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'systematic circumlocution' (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 27).

<sup>2</sup> For one articulation of these different functions of the conceptual framework, see Bernstein's 'Research and Languages of Description', in Bernstein, 1996. See also Brown and Dowling, op. cit.

<sup>3</sup> Sally Power's description of her 'dismay' at the extent of the idiosyncrasies of the case study school's in her research, and her concern 'that these would "interfere" with the search for generalities' (Power, 1998, p. 20), reflects this disconcerting aspect of carrying out research in a limited range of settings, or 'cases'.

where the potential sample group is small, ensuring variety across some pertinent features (age, gender, ethnicity) may be as much as it is possible, or necessary, to control in order to ensure that some valid learning takes place.

### **The process of selection of the institutions**

The basis of the reasoning behind my selection of institutions was the relatively crude, yet still plausible distinction between institutions at the two extremes of our higher education system that I described in the introduction. Consistent with this distinction, the institutions I approached all fitted the category of either traditional, highly selective, pre-1992 university or new, access oriented, post-1992 university. Both of the Political Thought classes were in institutions that conformed very closely to the reputation, selection criteria and intake associated with this crude distinction. The contrast between the institutions where I observed the American Literature modules conformed slightly less closely with the stereotype.<sup>5</sup>

West University has an international reputation and attracts a very high proportion of fee paying international students while it is one of the universities with the lowest proportions of students from lower socio-economic groups. The Politics department also has an international reputation and appears in the top ten of university subject league tables. West University has the feel of a wealthy institution with a strong sense of its own identity: classrooms are well equipped; reception areas have been recently refurbished and reception staff are calm and helpful; electronic displays provide information about the days events; and students are familiar with the names and political interests of eminent individuals on the staff, in line with the institution's vision of itself as a centre of academic and political debate. Entry to the West University Politics course is highly competitive. The average student has an A level point score<sup>6</sup> of 29 and over eighty percent of students leave with either an upper second or first class degree. Students are required to write two essays each term, but the formal assessment is wholly based on an end of the year exam.

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<sup>4</sup> The conception of validity used within the study is explored in more detail in the next chapter.

<sup>5</sup> The universities have been given pseudonyms, and I have also altered some minor details in the descriptions, in order to maintain the anonymity of both the institutions and the participants.

<sup>6</sup> An 'A' grade at A-level gets 10 points, a 'B' grade eight points, etc..

South University has a poor academic reputation but a clear access mission and a very strong tradition of serving 'non traditional' students from the local community. According to university league tables, it has amongst the highest proportions of part-time students, of students from lower socio-economic groups and from ethnic minority backgrounds. The university as a whole has amongst the highest university drop-out rates and the Politics department has come in the bottom ten of recent subject league tables. In contrast to West University's points score requirement of 29, the South University Politics course only requires an A level point score of 12 and only around thirty percent of students get an upper second or first class degree. Assessment for the Introduction to Political Thought is through written assignments completed at the end of the module.

North University is a traditional university with an international reputation but also has a strong community mission. It attracts a high proportion of students from the ethnically diverse local community and has a relatively high proportion of students from lower socio-economic groups (30% in contrast to South University's 40% and West University's 12%). The North University English department has slightly lower A level entry requirements than the West University Politics department (23 points rather than 29 points), but has a slightly higher proportion of students graduating with upper second and first class degrees (90% in comparison with West University's 83%). North University thus conforms to the stereotype of a traditional, highly selective university in terms of academic status and student achievement, but does not conform so precisely in terms of the social and ethnic composition of its student body.

East University as a whole has a very poor academic reputation, but the English department scores relatively highly, coming in the top half of some subject leagues tables. However, this does not mean that it is able to attract students with higher entry qualifications than the rest of the university: the average A level point score for students in the English department is 13, and a significant number of students come in through clearing (i.e. they did not put North University down as one of their choices on their original application). While some staff in the English department found the entry level of students frustrating, admissions were in line with the access mission of the university. In East University as a whole, the proportion of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds is similar to that in South University, and the proportion of students from

ethnic minorities in the English department is slightly higher than in the North University department (30% rather than North University's 25%). The percentage of students graduating with upper second or first class degrees is 46%, higher than the South University Politics department, but significantly lower than either North or West University. So, in terms of its mission and student composition, East University is very similar to South University. However, overall the English departments at East and North Universities have more in common than the Politics departments at South and West Universities.<sup>7</sup>

The difference in the comparison between the classes in the English departments and the classes in the Politics departments illustrates the dangers inherent in an oversimplistic use of institutions as a signifier of class. However, the data specific to each institution allows us to establish a picture of where each department is positioned in relation to the different criteria of reputation, student entry qualifications, and other features of the student body as a whole.

### **The process of selection of the modules**

There were several criteria for selection of the modules that constituted the object of the research. First, as I have already explained, I wanted to contrast a temporally dominant discipline with a descriptive, or critical discipline. Secondly, I wanted to select disciplines in which I had at least some background knowledge, so I would be able to use my own judgement to assess and analyse disciplinary statements. Political Thought and American Literature fulfilled both of these criteria. Finally, I wanted the modules in each university to be as similar as possible, so I would, ideally, be able to compare discussions of the same texts in two contexts.

The canon of Modern Political Thought is narrow and extremely stable and as a result the course outline and set texts for the first year Political Thought modules at the two universities overlapped to a significant extent. Both included as primary texts Hobbes' *Leviathan*, Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*, Mill's *On Liberty*, Marx and Engels' *The Communist Manifesto* and Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*. The West University

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<sup>7</sup> The main source for the data in this section is the Guardian University Guide, [www.educationGuardian.co.uk/university\\_guide](http://www.educationGuardian.co.uk/university_guide), retrieved 30/5/2002. Some statistics have been slightly

Introduction to Political Thought was spread over two terms, and the Modern Political Thought section of the course took up a whole term. In contrast, in South University the Introduction to Political Thought module lasted for one term, and the Modern section took up eight out of the twelve weeks. In West University the lectures tended to take a slightly more philosophical approach to the discipline while the South University lectures were, relatively, more historically based. In South University, in addition to the set texts that were shared with West University, there were also sessions on Hegel, Feminism, and Radical Political Movements. Thus, while the majority of the set texts in the classes that I observed represent the perspectives of either Liberal or social contract theory, Marxism was also studied in both universities, while other radical streams of Political Thought were only introduced in South University. The differences between the modules reflected the political position of both the course lecturers and the institutions. West University as an institution might be said to identify closely with dominant political institutions, and the fact that it had recently cut option modules in Radical Thought and that the Political Thought lecturers could all be categorised within the paradigm of liberalism would clearly be consistent with this close identification with the establishment. South University, in contrast, historically has a reputation as a radical institution and the Political Thought tutor was a politically active Marxist, which was reflected in his inclusion of radical political movements within the core first year syllabus. These differences were also evident, to a certain extent, in the presentation of the texts within the lectures, but the general presentation of the canonical texts was broadly similar in both universities.

There is also an identifiable, if slightly less narrow or stable canon for American Literature courses. Sessions on slave narratives, Melville's *Moby Dick* and Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* provided a common core on both of the modules that I observed. Both courses also included texts by Henry James. As was the case in Political Thought, North University, the selective, 'old' university, offered a two term, rather than a one term course. This was presented as having the very general aim:

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adapted to maintain the anonymity of the institutions, i.e. some figures have been adjusted by one or two percentage points so institutions cannot be easily identified by reference to the source tables.



to read a range of significant American literature from the nineteenth century and thus be made familiar with the major themes and stylistic trends within this literature and the social and intellectual history of the period. (North University American Literature course outline)

The East University tutor explained her course in slightly narrower, or more specific terms:

I conceive of it as a thematic module. And the theme is the extent to which notions of American nationhood and notions of American identity are produced through experiences of movement, migration, exile, border crossing ... the concern is, how do we know what America is? (East University American Literature tutor, interview)

This apparent difference was reflected to some extent in the set texts, which in East University included poetry by Chinese, Japanese and Mexican Americans, and prison writings by African Americans. However, in fact, the same questioning of what 'America' means, and of what it means to be American, were central in both tutors' presentation of their courses. It is also worth noting that both tutors were graduates of American Studies now teaching in English departments, and the students were all studying either straight Literature or Literature and Drama courses. In an American Studies degree, history and geography are taught by specialists in separate modules, and so a certain level of contextual knowledge about America can be assumed in literature classes. Tutors teaching American Literature on an English degree cannot assume that their students have this type of background knowledge, and both of the tutors in my study felt a certain obligation to feed in historical information through their lectures.

**Table 1: Classes observed**

East University American Literature	Introduction to the course: Gary Soto poems	Melville, <i>Moby Dick</i> , 1	Melville, <i>Moby Dick</i> , 2	Olaudah Equiano, <i>The Interesting Narrative</i>	Prison writings	Immigrant poetry		
North University American Literature	Hawthorne, <i>The Scarlet Letter</i>	Slave narratives	Melville, 'Benito Cereno'	Twain, <i>Huckleberry Finn</i>	Melville, <i>Moby Dick</i> , 1	Melville, <i>Moby Dick</i> , 2	Davis, 'Life in the Iron Mills' and Alcott, short story.	

West University Political Thought	Hobbes	Locke	Rousseau, 1	Rousseau, 2	Mill	Hobbes, + Social Contract Theory	Marx and Engels	Revision session
South University Political Thought	Locke, Mill and liberalism	Rousseau vs Burke	Essay writing workshop	Hegel	Marx and Engels	Radical political thought		

In addition to the overlap in set texts, the format of the all four classes, while not identical, was at least comparable. In three of the four departments the seminar followed on from a lecture on the same topic. The lectures, which I also attended, took place either in the hour immediately before the class, or earlier in the week. In North University and South University, the lecture was given by the class tutor. In West University, the lecture was given by the course co-ordinator, rather than by the class tutor, who was a doctoral student in the department. In the East University American Literature class, the tutor integrated her lecture and the class discussion into one two hour session. In each case, the classes were designed to provide opportunities for student participation and discussion. I attended and in some cases also videoed the lectures, but based my analysis mainly on the section of the sessions that included student participation.

The comparison across disciplines might perhaps be affected by the fact that the Introduction to Political Thought is a first year module, while the American Literature option, in both universities, is a second/third year module. Clearly, students might be expected to have developed their fluency in disciplinary vocabularies and their confidence in the academic setting during additional years of study. This possibility was considered during each stage of the analysis, and the interpretations presented, I would argue, do not rely on this feature of comparability across the disciplines. Nevertheless, it is also worth noting that several students in both Political Thought classes were not in fact in their first year at university, some had already studied Politics and/or Philosophy at school while others had not, and several had direct experience of political activism. In the American Literature classes, few of the students had any background in the study of American History, which was relatively central to the presentation of the discipline by

both tutors. These complicating details suggest that generalisations about the level of induction of students into the discipline and culture of their classes require some care.

### **The process of selection of the classes**

The selection of classes was largely opportunistic. As a part of the process of negotiating access, I spoke to all the class tutors and also to the West University Political Thought course co-ordinator before finalising arrangements for coming to observe their sessions. These discussions were fairly informal and mostly consisted in them explaining the background, structure and aims of their courses, as well as asking me any questions that they had about my research. However, in each case there was more than one class running that I might have observed, and the tutors and in West University, the course co-ordinator contributed to my selection of which class to go in to.

In West University, there were several first year Political Thought classes running, taught by several postgraduate students. The classes had already been running for about half a term by the time the arrangements were being made. The course co-ordinator suggested that it would be best for me to contact the only tutor who was not teaching the course for the first time and who, on the basis of previous observations, she felt conformed very well to the preferred teaching style of the department. In addition, the particular group this tutor was teaching was considered to be particularly high level and to exemplify the type of seminar interaction that the department was aiming for.

In both South and East University I had a choice between an evening and a morning class. The East University English tutor suggested that I come to the evening class, since students were often late for the nine a.m. session. The South University Politics tutor suggested that I come to the morning session, since people were often more tired in the evening class. I went along with the suggestion of both tutors.

In North University, the tutor repeated the same session twice on Monday mornings, after giving his nine a.m. lecture. He was happy for me to attend either class, despite the fact that he found the eleven a.m. class slightly easier to teach. In the end, I went to the ten a.m. class, the group he was finding slightly more awkward to teach.

### **The process of selection of student interviewees<sup>8</sup>**

There were some minimal criteria that I aimed to fulfil in identifying students to take part in individual interviews. I wanted to interview both male and female students and I wanted to interview both students who spoke in class and those who did not speak. I also anticipated that there might be occasions where I would want to speak to specific students about specific interventions they had made in class, although in the event this was less significant than I had expected, and I planned interviews for specific students who had agreed to be interviewed, rather than selecting students to fit the interview schedule.

The identification of student interviewees varied slightly in each setting. In East University, where we were a very small class and the atmosphere was quite relaxed, over the course of the sessions I approached all of the students to ask if they would mind being interviewed. All agreed, except for one who found it difficult to get time off work, the two students from the US, who also said that they didn't have time, and one student who had to start attending the morning class, because of work commitments. There was one other student who agreed to be interviewed, but we didn't manage to arrange a time to meet. So I interviewed four of the nine regular attenders. In South University, the process was similar, but it was harder to keep track of who I had asked, because the class composition was less stable, and because about half of the students would regularly leave after the lecture, before the seminar. I asked all of the regular attenders and interviewed six. In West University, the process was more or less the same: I approached all of the students who attended the class regularly and interviewed all those who agreed and could find the time.

In North University, I found the process slightly more problematic. Because the class was larger, it took me longer to get to know the students in the group, which made me slightly more tentative about approaching people. In addition, as I have noted, the tutor had found the class slightly awkward, and although this was not excessive, the atmosphere was not very relaxed, people did not seem to hang about and chat, or to make general conversation at all during the classes. I initially approached students who had made some sort of contact, either by catching my eye or smiling, or who I had

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<sup>8</sup> As with the universities, the participants have all been given pseudonyms, and I have occasionally

talked to in group-work during the session. I also approached one or two students who had either spoken a lot, or not at all. In this way, I did manage to cover my initial criteria, but when I had finished, I discovered that all of the students I had interviewed were third years, when in fact about half of the class were in their second year. I suspect that the additional confidence of the third year students, or the additional hesitancy of the second years, combined with the slightly tense atmosphere in the class, influenced my identification of interviewees. Some possible causes and effects of the slight awkwardness the tutor had noticed in the class will be discussed in more detail in chapter six.

**Table 2: Student interviewees<sup>9</sup>**

	Number of students who regularly attended seminar.	Student Interviewees					
East University American Literature	9	Helen	Hamid	Edward	Monica		
North University American Literature	21	David	Rajpal	Ambia	Rose	Sevket	Bashir
West University Political Thought	12	Rachel	Tom	Harrison	Megan	Charlotte	Mark
South University Political Thought	12	Will	Gabor	Laura	Nadia	Guy	Waheed

### 2.3. Observation, participation and research ethics.

Another paradox of research is embodied in the inevitable conflict between the desire to collect reliable data and the desire to maintain ethical relations with human ‘participants’ in social research. In carrying out observational studies, the need to gain and maintain access and to elicit relevant data constitute quite different rationales for decision making to the need to be open and ethical, although sometimes the conclusions of these two reasoning processes may coincide or the distinction between the reasoning processes may become entangled. At an extreme it can be argued that all observation constitutes a form of symbolic violence in the construction of its object (see, for example, Chow, 1993). There are, however, persuasive practical justifications for

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altered minor details in describing the participants, in order to ensure their anonymity.

<sup>9</sup> Tables of anonymised details of all students can be found in appendix 2.

observational research, which might even be presented as a way of mitigating some of the dangers of objectification: political claims can be constructed about the democratising potential of some ethnographic and observational research (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994, p. 256); more pragmatic positions simply suggest that observational studies can increase the validity of research and thus reduce the distortions of objectification. I think there is some validity in both these positions, however it is the more pragmatic justifications of observational methods that motivated my research design.

The most obvious pragmatic justification for observation is that it avoids over-reliance on second-hand data collected through, for example, interviews or questionnaires (Deacon et al, 1999, p. 258 – 9). Kay Thomas's research into the relationship between gender and disciplinary identity in higher education (Thomas, 1990) was limited by its reliance on interview data. She was not, for example, able to evaluate any gap between her participants' reporting of their experience in the classroom and what had actually taken place, and thus she could not distinguish between differences in the ways in which male and female students participate in the classroom and the differences in the ways that female and male students represent their experience of the classroom in an interview setting. Another significant advantage of longer term observation is that it enables you to develop an understanding of what counts as 'normal' within the setting that you are observing, and thus to develop a reliable basis for identifying 'critical' cases, or what constitutes the margins of the practice (Deacon et al, *ibid*, p. 260). This feature of longer term observation was particularly significant in relation to my objective of identifying the boundaries of legitimate classroom practice within different disciplines. It was only the analysis of transcripts of classes from a series of sessions that gave me a reliable basis for constructing a definition of 'marginal' practice. Although the interviews alone might have provided me with clues as to certain individuals or types of intervention that participants considered unusual or comment worthy, it was the observation data that provided a sound basis for such interpretations.

Observational research does not necessarily involve videoing. However, the level of detail required in order to analyse the nature of disciplinary statements meant that I would need a full transcript of class discussions. My main reason for videoing the sessions, then, was to facilitate the transcribing process, and to help me to identify

speakers in relatively large group discussions. However, there was a secondary, aim connected to the difficulty of establishing what counts as informed consent<sup>10</sup>. Even if you provide participants with a detailed account of the processes and possible outcomes of the research, the extent to which they can genuinely be aware of the ways in which you may interpret their contributions, and of how these interpretations may then be presented in the reporting of the research, is still arguable. I want to suggest that the use of video, which acts as a constant reminder of the active presence of the researcher, can facilitate the process of ensuring that participants in observational settings are aware of the material consequences of their consent to participate in the research.

The student participants in my research cannot have had a very detailed or precise sense of what I was doing. The issue of informed consent was addressed most explicitly the first time I visited each class when I spent about five minutes at the beginning of the session explaining my project and answering any questions. I also provided an information sheet to all my participants (see appendix 1), and offered a variety of other opportunities for student participants to ask me about my research, either in person or through e-mail. None of the students took me up on these offers and I was left slightly uncertain of the extent to which they understood the kind of activity that I was involved in. However, a video does constitute a very visible intrusion into a classroom and in some way, I would argue, the presence of the video constituted another level on which students were constantly reminded of the research process in which they had agreed to participate. By remaining in the classes with the video recording, and, more importantly, by adapting their participation, if they wished to, in response to the video, the students could, in a sense, be said to have both re-asserted their consent, and to have taken some, limited, control over what they had consented to. Because the main subject matter of the class discussions was not of a particularly sensitive nature, I judged the risk that the camera would deter participation in a way that would seriously affect my findings was unlikely, while the limited control that it might give to participants was desirable. In this instance, then, the ethical and the practical justifications for the research method are distinct, but the decision to use a video in my data collection was consistent with both sets of considerations. In addition to using the video as a device to facilitate informed consent, I also provided all participants with the transcripts of the

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<sup>10</sup> See Miller and Bell, 2002, for a detailed discussion of some of these difficulties.

classes each week, to give them a sense of the way in which their activity was being transformed in the process of my research.

My participation in class discussions was also motivated by both pragmatic and ethical considerations. I have so far avoided using the term 'participant observation', which, in a similar way to 'case study', is used too generally to add much clarity to a description of research. However, Deacon et al's definition of participant observation as 'intended to generate more information and data than would be possible without participation' (op. cit p. 251) provides a useful clarification of pragmatic motivations for researcher participation in observation settings. Ethical issues arise, however, when one of the methods of 'generating more information' involves explicitly setting out to establish rapport with your participants. The practice of 'establishing rapport' has been presented in standard research methods literature as an ethically unproblematic and essential research strategy (see, for example, Fontana and Frey, 1994, p. 367). Jean Duncombe and Julie Jessop, however, have argued against the neutrality of the strategy, describing 'the 'commodification' of the skills of 'doing rapport'' (Duncombe and Jessop, 2002, p. 109) as an ethically ambiguous research practice. They are particularly concerned about cases where the professional construction of rapport can 'encourage or persuade interviewees to explore and disclose experiences and emotions which – on reflection – they may have preferred to keep to themselves or even 'not to know'' (ibid, p. 120)<sup>11</sup>. However, I would argue that the issue of 'doing rapport' has more general repercussions in relation to informed consent, and there is an extent to which deliberately generating good relations with your participants inevitably reduces their expectation that you are going to analyse the data that they provide in a way that can be perceived as both academically and personally critical. In addition to the pragmatic objective of getting a better sense of the classroom interaction, then, I also saw my participation in the classes that I observed as an opportunity for students to hear me express opinions and to get a sense of me as someone who might disagree with them, so that they would also, perhaps, gain a small sense that in engaging in my research they were offering themselves up to some kind of critical analysis from someone who might not be wholly

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<sup>11</sup> Valerie Hey, in her development of a more complex argument about the politics of research, suggests that theorising rapport as a commodity in this way can be over reductive. She argues that this conceptualisation of rapport ignores the constitutive excess of emotion, experience and psychic identifications that makes up instances of rapport and that also constitutes a basis from which to theorise



friendly or impartial. In this way a possible perception of me as an 'objective' researcher would, I hoped, be undermined.

My participation consisted in my doing the reading for each session and trying to make sure that I contributed to class discussions in most, if not all of the sessions. I also joined smaller groups when tutors divided the classes for some specific activities. In this way I achieved my pragmatic objective of getting a sense of the class and of what it was like to listen and offer contributions within the group. My position in class discussions, however, was slightly different in the two disciplines. In the Political Thought classes I had a thorough grasp on the detail of the arguments from the outset, and so my participation was less natural, or, on some occasions, was more in the role of teacher than student. In the American Literature classes, where I was studying new texts within a discipline that I have not studied formally beyond A level, I felt that I was in a more similar position to the students: I had genuine questions to ask, and was genuinely tentative in offering my own interpretations. These discipline specific positions gave me different insights into the classes. For example, in one of the Political Thought classes I found myself articulating a point I wanted to make as a question to the tutor. The fact that although I was confident of my understanding, I still conformed to the convention of posing statements as questions revealed the strength of the classroom culture which constructed the majority of student interventions as questions.

It is more difficult for me to evaluate the effectiveness of my participation as a way of enhancing informed consent. A proper evaluation of this would have required another level of data collection, which was not incorporated into my research design. However, these reflections do seem to me to suggest a possible area for future investigation into the ethics of research methods.

## **2.4. Some contextual features of the interviews.**

It is a truism within qualitative research that interviews are inter-subjective contexts that constitute their own modes of interaction. Labov's much cited analysis of two

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'sameness' as a basis for political engagement (Hey, 2000). This argument, however, does not suggest

interviews with the same eight-year-old boy demonstrates how the adult interviewer can manipulate the setting to increase the responsiveness of an un-talkative informant (Labov, 1969). The same point has since been developed and refined in the qualitative research literature. Tom Wengraf's detailed analysis of extracts from research interviews demonstrates not only how the researcher's interventions can be specifically formulated to facilitate informants responses, but also how each intervention, from both researcher and informant, combines in an interactive process that constructs the interview as a social event (Wengraf, 2001, ch. 2). However, the precise interpretation of this social event is problematic. Wengraf suggests that in most cases there will be alternative plausible interpretations of an interview transcript and that fuller information about the precise vocal and emotional inflection of interventions within the interview can help to narrow down these multiple possibilities. He concludes that in order to interpret interactive interview processes 'it will be very important to know more than the words on the page tell us about the interview interaction' (ibid, p. 25). This does not mean that it is impossible to make any interpretations based on what will be inevitably an incomplete record of the context of data collection. It does however mean that possible contextual factors influencing the construction of the interview must be taken into account within our interpretations. One significant contextual factor in my interviews with students was the culture of the classes that we had both attended. The possibility of becoming 'too drawn into the view of the world constructed by those we are studying' (Deacon et al, 1999, p. 256) and of the danger that this may lead to a loss of analytical distance has been discussed in the qualitative research literature. My suggestion is that my position within the cultures that I was researching may have affected my mode of questioning: that the culture of the classroom influenced my interaction with my interviewees.

The interviews in my study were designed to elicit students' re-iteration of disciplinary ideas as well as some reflection on the sessions, the discipline, and the students' general experience of the classroom. The interview schedules (See appendix 3) were based closely on the observed sessions. During the period when I was observing a module I would attend the class, spend the next two or three days transcribing the video of the session, and then use the transcript to prepare the interview schedule for the next week's

interviews. The interview began with some general questions about the classes and then I would show the student a list of concepts discussed in the previous session. I would ask them to explain or define a selection, including some they found easy or interesting, and some they found more difficult. Then I would give them a transcript of the previous session, and we would discuss some short extracts that I had marked on the text<sup>12</sup>. I used follow up questions, to try to identify and clarify students' own opinions on disciplinary concepts and claims, and also to explore the possible origins of these opinions. Although I had prepared prompts for some stages of the interview, most follow up questions were constructed spontaneously during the interview. It seems plausible, then, to suggest that the nature and quantity of follow up questions may have been influenced by the culture of the class that I was observing. Indeed, during my analysis of the interviews, it seemed to me that my questioning on conceptual issues was more rigorous and challenging with students from the West University Political Thought class than with students from the South University class. This difference correlated with the more confident and combative nature of the West University students' classroom discussions.

In relation to the analysis, what is important is to ensure that such differences as, for example, greater quantities of data or fuller explanations of individual positions, are not interpreted as representative of students' ideas or abilities, but rather as representative of the way such ideas were expressed in the particular contexts of the classroom and of the interview. Thus while it may be a feature of qualitative data collection that involves both observation and interviews that the culture of the research site influences the interview interaction, as long as this is factored into your interpretations, it need not affect the reliability and validity of the analysis.

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<sup>12</sup> In the initial interviews I carried out, in East University and South University, I also took in the video, so that students could watch and listen to the extracts as well as reading them in the transcript. However, following the video took more time than simply reading the transcript, and seemed to produce only minimal additional information, so in the final interviews I only provided students with a transcript.

## **2.5. The tutor interviews, the object of research and the process of analysis.**

The tutor interviews<sup>13</sup>, like the student interviews, included discussion of extracts from the transcripts, and thus, in themselves, constituted one stage of feedback to participants on my research. However, the ethical issues that arose in this stage of feedback were more complex than those that arose in the feedback to student participants. The first of these issues relates to a sense in which I was breaking an un-stated confidentiality with students when I discussed their interventions with their tutors. The second issue relates to the extent to which I was willing to accept tutors' interpretations of the classes or, alternatively, I was simply using their interpretations as additional data.

One or two of the students I interviewed seemed a little surprised or uncertain when I asked them to comment on interventions by other students in the class. I interpreted this as either a lack of interest in other students' opinions, or an unwillingness to cast judgement on their peers. However, I did not find these responses ethically problematic, since any judgment they might make was not made from a position of authority. In contrast, the tutors' judgements carried some authority, and thus when I was asking them to articulate evaluations of students that they might not have formulated without my prompting, there was a sense in which I was responsible for making students vulnerable to unusual scrutiny by their tutors. This was particularly apparent when I introduced issues relating to problematic or marginal students into interviews with tutors. On several occasions I felt a sense of complicity with the tutors in discussing interventions that in some ways went counter to the culture of the classes. This sense of complicity was enhanced because I tended to share more of my initial interpretations with the tutors than with the students. This was partly because these interviews took place later than the student interviews, at least a few weeks after the end of the period of observation. It was also because, in relation to questions about the discipline, the tutors would be more likely than students firstly to understand the point of my interpretations, and, secondly, to offer pertinent alternative interpretations. Thus while both the student and tutor interviews constituted a part of the process of analysis of the class transcripts, this was more explicit in the interviews with the tutors.

At the same time, I felt that, precisely because their position in the classes constituted an element of their professional authority, the tutors were in some ways more vulnerable than the students. I was opening up aspects of their professional practice for examination in a way that they might not have anticipated or desired. There was also a certain level of deceit, or 'doing rapport', in my discussions with the tutors: I was asking for their opinion on extracts of the classes, and thus apparently involving them in the process of analysis, while in fact I wielded ultimate authority as to the extent to which I either incorporated their interpretations into my analysis or, alternatively, analysed their interpretations as exemplifications of their practice. So, when a Political Thought tutor provided an insightful analysis of the way a student's interventions conformed to her expectations of academic discourse within class discussions, I incorporated this into my analysis of the discipline, but when an American Literature tutor analysed his approach to issues of gender in the classroom, this became a part of the object of my analysis of his position as tutor. It can, perhaps, be self indulgent to make too much of these ethical conundrums. The tutors I interviewed were aware of the general processes of academic analysis in the social sciences, and all of them had also shown an interest in the analysis of their practice, which was why they had agreed to participate in the research in the first place. Nevertheless, despite the fact that participants may understand and consent to the ambiguities inherent in the interview process, it is desirable to maintain some clarity in conceptualising the function of each stage of the research, and to be aware that the distinction between generating data and generating analysis is not always easy to maintain.

In addition to the scheduled tutor interviews immediately following the observation period, I also arranged additional meetings with two of the tutors about mid-way into my analysis, and then, as I was nearing completion of the research, I sent a summary of my findings both to tutors and also to student participants. There was more clarity about this final stage of consultation, and the feedback I got from tutors on the summary was used solely to clarify points in the analysis, and not as further data to be interpreted.

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<sup>13</sup> An example of a tutor interview schedule can be found in Appendix 4.

## **2.6. Transforming the data into the thesis: field notes, transcription and the process of analysis.**

I have already partially described some of the processes by which the events that constituted the object of research began to be transformed into the research itself. Notes taken during interviews and classroom observations constitute, perhaps, the first of these processes. The transcription of talk into text is also a significant stage in the transformation of the data. The interview discussions, as I have already described, were also a part of the process of translating the events that took place in the classroom into the analysis that constitutes the research. The most significant stage of this process of translation, however, came after the main period of data collection, reading, annotating, comparing and analysing whole transcripts and extracts of the transcripts.

I took notes during the classes and also after interviews. The class-notes recorded both the disciplinary content of the session and also any initial thoughts on significant interventions or features of the interaction. I also usually made some brief notes after the interviews to remind myself of my general impressions, and points that I thought would be significant in the analysis, and, similarly, I annotated transcripts with initial interpretations as I was transcribing. However, I am generally fairly dubious about the value of such impressionistic analysis. It is at this point, I feel, that the researcher's position is most likely to lack distance from the material, and so such observations should be treated as data, rather than as analysis carried out with appropriate critical distance. My initial responses to a comment, an individual, or a setting may point me in the direction of a fruitful line of analysis. They should not, however, be treated as more reliable or valid than later interpretations. For example, during one interview, a slightly reticent student, speaking in a slightly monotonous voice, commented with some scepticism about the supposed increase in openness in relation to issues of 'race' and sexuality. I asked her if she included herself in her scepticism, and she replied 'Oh, I think I'm a very open person'. Although I laughed when she said this and so she was clearly being relatively light hearted, I initially took her comment at face value, and interpreted it as an indication of a certain complacency and lack of reflexivity in relation to the issues we were discussing. In fact, though, I did not have enough data to support

this initial interpretation. Perhaps her comment was intentionally ironic. There is, I would argue, a limit to the usefulness of field-notes as an interpretive tool, and they should be used with care in guiding, rather than providing, the process of interpretation.

Some people clearly work in a different way from me, and make far more use of stream of consciousness, impressionistic recording of their own responses to data. Tom Wengraf is almost evangelical in his enthusiasm for 'self debriefing', and he suggests 'free associating' onto tape or paper immediately after an interview (Wengraf, 2001, p. 138), or writing down the 'flood of memories that will be provoked' when you listen to your tapes for the first time (ibid, 209). He argues that this stage of note taking is 'as central to understanding the interview and advancing your professional competence for interviewing in general as is the recording and analysis of the interview' (ibid, p. 138). My reticence about this method is undoubtedly connected to my almost complete inability to 'free associate' at any time, including when I have just finished an interview, or when I have just listened to a recording of my data. I don't really want to deny that this approach to data processing may yield significant insights, but equally, I am unwilling to accept that my inability to work in this way invalidates my own analysis.

The main consideration in carrying out the transcription of recorded data must always be the level of analysis that is needed to meet the objectives of the research (Wengraf, ibid, p. 223). The structure of my research required two different levels of analysis. Firstly, distinguishing and describing disciplinary statements typical of Political Thought and American Literature, required accurate transcription of the ideas and the way that ideas were developed and related to each other in the participants talk: the precise vocabulary, intonation and other paralinguistic features were unlikely to influence this level of analysis. The second level of analysis of the transcripts was intended to identify the way students positioned themselves within the classroom. At this level of analysis the interpretation of paralinguistic signals is more likely to be of significance than in the analysis of disciplinary statements. In an ideal situation I would have systematised my method of recording of such signals before I began my research. In practice, my transcription was not so systematic, and I used a variety of different methods to record non-verbal information within my observation and interview data.

I fully or very nearly fully transcribed all my video and audio-tape data, creating sentences out of the recorded speech. I occasionally summarised the gist of what someone was saying, rather than transcribing word for word, usually when a tutor was speaking at length, perhaps giving several explanations of the same point. I used a variety of methods for recording non-verbal information. I sometimes used footnotes to record observations, about, for example, groupings within the classroom that were visible in the video footage, or a sense of a particular mood or atmosphere. I also inserted comments into my transcripts, if a speaker was, for example, notably hesitant, or if participants were, for example, inattentive. I did not use any systematic methods for transcribing pauses, interruptions or overlapping speech, although I did record these features when they appeared to me to be significant, either as individual instances or as a feature of a particular setting. During the process of analysis, if I felt that an interpretation was reliant on an interpretation of paralinguistic features, I returned to the original tapes to check the meaning of my notations. Thus, although not wholly systematic, the combination of transcription and re-checking within the analysis provided enough detail to ensure the reliability of my interpretations.

As I have said, the main stages of the analysis, and the most difficult to describe, came after the majority of the data had been collected, when I was reading, annotating, comparing and analysing whole transcripts and extracts of transcripts. In the first stage of this process, I was largely familiarising myself with the data, although I was also continually looking for ways to make comparisons across the settings. My first attempts at writing an analysis of the data did not incorporate a clear definition of the disciplines. Instead it picked out some instances of students' discussion of issues within the discipline that they were studying, at the same time as making comparisons across the sites in relation to the extent to which the tutor controlled the discussion and in relation to the overall 'academic' or 'less academic' nature of interventions. While some individual interpretations from this initial stage were incorporated into the final analysis, the initial categorisation of 'academic' and 'non academic' interventions did not meet the objectives of the study, which required a more specific definition of the disciplines.

The final stage of data processing included two distinct modes of analysis. The first mode of analysis constituted the development of a definition of the disciplines. I began



with some sense of the structure of arguments in Political Thought, while I was less familiar with the structure of arguments in American Literature. During the analysis I identified interventions in the class transcripts that constituted disciplinary statements, or knowledge claims, and compared the structure of these statements across and within the disciplines. When I began to construct a definition of each discipline, I checked it against other examples from the transcripts. However, I did not carry out a comprehensive analysis of every intervention in each session, to see whether they conformed to structure of the discipline as I had defined it. There were two reasons for omitting this level of analysis. Firstly, the nature of the discussions in the classes meant that some interactions were more social than academic, and so it would be difficult to decide which interventions should be counted in a quantitative analysis of statements that conformed or failed to conform to my definition of the discipline. Secondly, my definitions were not inconsistent with definitions of the disciplines provided in external sources, the tutor interviews and academic textbooks, for example. These external sources, then, provided an additional check on the reliability of my interpretation of the features of the disciplines.

The second mode of analysis was intended to identify students' positioning within the classes. To some extent, then, each interpretation stands alone as a description of an individual student's positioning within a specific context. However, I was also identifying similarities in these positions that would enable me to make generalisations about groups of students within and across the different settings. My main strategy for constructing these generalisations was to identify similarities between individual interpretations, rather than to check one interpretation across the whole data set. The level of detail involved in the close textual analysis of talk and cross checking across interview and observation data made this kind of comprehensive analysis of the whole data set somewhat unfeasible. Having begun to identify similarities in the positioning of different groups, however, I did then check across the relevant class and interview transcripts to see if other examples in the data supported my generalisations. While this process was not comprehensive to the extent of checking that every intervention conformed to one of the categories I was constructing, it was comprehensive to the extent that I referred to examples across the whole data set to check the limits of the claims I could make based on my interpretation of specific extracts of data. This enabled me to check the validity of these interpretations as a representation of larger

groups of students. These two different types of analysis, the construction of definitions of the disciplines and the interpretation of student positions, are explained in more detail in the next chapter. Here I have merely been evoking a sense of the practical processes that correlated with the development of the analysis at a more abstract level.

Finally, it is worth noting that some of the data collected was not subjected to the full process of analysis. I collected example student essays, reading lists and course handouts from each of the modules. These materials were used to develop a fuller understanding of the context, and were only rarely drawn upon in specific interpretations within the analysis.

## **2.7. Conclusions.**

This chapter has attempted to provide a clear picture of the empirical object of the research, while maintaining a sense of the fragility and permeability of its boundaries. I have argued that, despite their idiosyncrasies, the institutions selected for comparison can reasonably be taken to represent distinct social and educational cultures and thus to provide an adequate basis for comparisons made within the study. Similarly, although the disciplines are constituted in slightly different ways in the different institutions, the objects represented in the observed modules are similar enough to provide a valid basis for comparison of interaction in the different settings. The boundaries of both the institutions and the disciplines, I have suggested, are constructed by the study and are neither stable nor autonomous entities. Similarly, I have suggested, the process of data collection is constitutive of the data that is its object and the methods of data collection themselves are constituted in relation to both pragmatic and ethical considerations. By exploring the limits of the sites, objects and methods of data collection and of the discursive rationales for the use of the chosen methods, I hope to have both provided a plausible account of the research design and also demonstrated that the liminal features described in this chapter have been taken into account in the analysis of the data.

The next chapter will set out the framework for analysis that was both developed and applied in processing the data. It will also present an initial objectification of the

disciplines and a Lacanian conception of gender, each of which constitutes a reference point for the analysis of student positioning within the study.

## Chapter 3

# THE INTERPRETIVE FRAMEWORK: NARRATIVE ANALYSIS, GENDER AND AN OBJECTIFICATION OF THE DISCIPLINES

### 3.1. Introduction

In this chapter I am going to attempt to set out, as far as possible, my methods of analysis and to explore the validity of the particular interpretive approach that I am using. The full process of construction of each specific interpretation is, inevitably, beyond description. Nevertheless, it is possible to construct a general account of the approaches being used. Very generally, then, the argument that will be developed in this chapter is that interpretations are valid on the basis that they aim to explore the construction of meaning, rather than to describe 'external reality'. This exploration of meaning, however, cannot take place without recourse to certain founding concepts that are external to the text under analysis. Most generally, a conception of coherence and consistency is used to identify where the stories or explanations presented in a text are suspect or incomplete. However, the process of constructing coherent meanings within interpretations also requires reference to other concepts that are external to the initial text. It is clearly not possible to justify all concepts used within all interpretations. However, certain ideas that structure the overall interpretive framework do require some exegesis. Within this chapter, therefore, I attempt to clarify my conception of gender, or 'the feminine', and also my definition of the disciplines of American Literature and Political Thought. These concepts require specific definition because they constitute central reference points within my interpretive framework.

The modes of analysis that I am describing can broadly be categorised as 'narrative' and 'content'. The purpose of this chapter is to clarify what is meant by the distinction between these two modes of analysis and the way that data is conceptualised within each mode. I am beginning with three ways of conceptualising data. The first two of these are *implicit* and *explicit* narratives. Although these two look different, in terms of some of their surface characteristics, they can be analysed in similar ways: as

representing the subjective position of the speaker. The third way of conceptualising data is as content rather than narrative. This is data that I am interpreting as an instance of itself, rather than as representative of inter-subjective relations between speaker and context. Content analysis is used within the thesis to define and identify the two disciplines and their methodologies.

In the first section of this chapter I will present a definition of 'narrative' and exemplify what is then involved in 'narrative analysis'. I will also explain how a conception of validity can be constructed in relation to this type of analysis. Finally, I will present two of the concepts that I will use to structure my interpretation of narratives within my data. The first of these is a de-essentialised conception of masculinity/femininity, derived from Lacan's definition of the feminine position within the symbolic order. The second structuring reference point within my analysis is an objectified conceptualisation of the two academic disciplines. The second section of the chapter sets out the processes of objectification of the disciplines through content analysis of my data.

### **3.2. Analysing subjectivity and gender: defining narrative analysis**

... The foregoing text consists of a sequence of propositions that is easily recognized as a narrative. But what makes it a narrative? Let us go back to the beginning of the story. First Boccaccio describes Naples, the setting for the action; next he presents the three protagonists; after that he speaks of Riciardo's love for Catella. Is that a narrative? Here I think we can readily agree that the answer is "no." ... The beginning of the text presents the description of a state of affairs. That does not suffice for narrative, however, as narrative requires the unfolding of an action, change, difference.

(Todorov, T, 1990, p. 27 – 28)

The narratives of the world are numberless. Narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances – as though any material were fit to receive man's stories. Able to be carried by articulated language, spoken or written, fixed or moving images, gestures, and the ordered mixture of all these substances; narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting (think of Carpaccio's Saint Ursula), stained glass windows, cinema, comics, news item, conversation. Moreover, under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative.

(Barthes, R, 1977, p. 79)

Experience is meaningful and human behaviour is generated from and informed by this meaningfulness. Thus the study of human behaviour needs to include an exploration of the meaning systems that form human experience. This book is an inquiry into narrative, the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful. Narrative meaning is a cognitive process that organizes human experiences into temporally meaningful episodes. Because this is a cognitive process, a mental operation, narrative meaning is not an “object” available to direct observation. However, the individual stories and histories that emerge in the creation of human narratives are available for direct observation. Examples of narrative include personal and social histories, myths, fairy tales, novels, and the everyday stories we use to explain our own and other’s actions.

(Polkinghorne, D, 1988, p.1)

A narrative – which I have defined as a mark, which makes knowable an instance of intersubjective experience – is any minimal linguistic or verbal act.

(McQuillan, M, 2000, p. 12)

### **Defining ‘narrative’**

I am describing my methods of analysis as narrative analysis. In order to explain this, I need, first of all, to explain what types of data I am counting as ‘narratives’ and then what I understand to be the methods of narrative analysis that I am using. As I have said, I am making an initial distinction between implicit and explicit narratives. Neither conforms to the narrower, conceptualisations of a narrative as a story, requiring, according to Todorov’s definition (above) ‘the unfolding of an action, change, difference’. Such conceptualisations of narrative begin from the form, rather than from the function, of stories: they start from the assumption that narratives have, for example, a content (events, characters, ideas) and a style (the way events are related, the order, McQuillan, 2000). When this attempt to define narrative through form is challenged, as in Barthes’ suggestion of ‘an almost infinite diversity of forms’, or in Smith’s refutation of the dualistic division between structure and content (Smith, 1981), an alternative conceptualisation is required. An alternative is offered in definitions of narrative based on their function in the production of identities, their function as, according to Polkinghorne, ‘the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful’. McQuillan, using a similarly functional definition of narrative as ‘a mark which makes

knowable an instance of inter-subjective experience', follows through to conclude that 'any minimal linguistic or verbal act' can thus constitute a narrative. This is the closest to the way I am using the concept of narrative in my analysis.

According to McQuillan's definition, what is being narrated, in any example of narrative, is the subjectivity both of the narrator and of any other subjects connected to the 'story' they are telling. A narration is seen as an act of social positioning, constructing alliances and differences between individuals and the context within which they are speaking. What this means can be explained by examining some examples from my research. The first example comes from an interview with Rachel from the West University Political Thought class. This is an example of an explicit narrative. Here she is explicitly describing events that take place in the classroom. More specifically, she is responding to a question about whether she finds it easy to speak in class:

Sometimes I do get a bit, I don't feel as eloquent as they are. So I'm a bit like, oh, like I said, I didn't study anything like this at A levels. It's completely new for me, whereas, what's his name, Mark, has done politics before, has studied philosophy before, and so he speaks, and I'm always a bit of a talker, so I'll speak before I think, whereas there are some people who are very good and keep quiet and then make a valid point ... Definitely the men speak more than the women, but I don't know if that's because they're men, or just because they tend to be louder. Because, like I say, I speak quite a bit, but that's because you can never get me in a room with other people and shut me up.

(Rachel, West University, interview)

At one level, Rachel is simply describing her perception of her own and others' participation in class discussions. However, at the same time, she offers an explanation of her account that seems to suggest that she feels her participation requires some justification. Her explanation constructs her participation in a way that is highly feminised. She says that 'there are some people who are very good and keep quiet and then make a valid point', constructing her own mode of participation, in opposition to this, as somehow 'bad' and uncontrolled. She also describes herself as 'a bit of a talker ... you can never get me in a room with other people and shut me up'. This corresponds to the feminine stereotype of the chatterbox, whose talk is uncontrolled and inconsequential. Why does she feel the need to portray herself in such a negative way?

Indeed, despite her claim that she doesn't think before she speaks, her actual contributions in the sessions are intelligent and relevant. So what is going on here?

This question can be answered if we consider Rachel's narrative as an attempt to produce a coherent account of her subjective position in the classroom. The inconsistency facing her in the context of the classroom is that she contributes relatively frequently in class – she describes herself as one of the students who tends to dominate class discussions – and that she also describes her frequent contributions as somehow 'bad', when, presumably, she wants to be 'good'. One explanation of this inconsistency is the contradictory codes of appropriate classroom behaviour, which construct participation as a criterion of academic success, but at the same time condone, or even approve, female students' lack of participation, as conforming to codes of gender behaviour. Rachel's own narration of her participation would be consistent with this, since her description of her own behaviour foregrounds feminised features, which might thus mitigate her occupation of the masculine position associated with academic success in the classroom. Her account can thus be seen as an attempt to produce a coherent identity within which she is able both to speak frequently in class and to maintain an account of herself as feminine.

There are, in fact, two different possible transgressions, two different sets of codes that Rachel has to negotiate. The first is the complex codes of the classroom: the combination of pedagogic and gendered discourses which both value participation and yet at the same time attribute different values to active participation by male and female students. The second set of codes is that of the interview, a conversation between two people. The interview setting does not require the same kind of performance as the classroom: it does not constitute the same kind of conflict between academic and feminine performance. As a conversation between two people it does, however, conform to gendered codes regulating legitimate modes of self-presentation. These complex and flexible codes might suggest, for example, that it is not appropriately feminine for a woman to appear too confident, or to brag about academic achievements. Conceptualising Rachel's story in this way, foregrounds the context of production of her narrative over its status as a 'true' or 'false' representation of her feelings. The narrative I have quoted, then, represents not only Rachel's construction of her subjectivity within the class, but also, and more directly, her construction of her subjectivity within the



interview. Her account identifies the masculine features of her performance within the class, but explicitly feminises these features by relating her feelings of inadequacy and lack of control. We cannot, of course, judge from her narration her 'true' feelings about her classroom participation. We might suspect that, since in fact her contributions in class are relevant and intelligent, it is likely that there are at least some occasions when she feels happy with what she has said, however she does not describe those occasions in her interview. While conformity with the criteria for success in the classroom requires her to produce what might be seen as a dominant, 'masculine' persona, the more flexible codes of the interview provide an opportunity for her to mitigate this impression.

Rachel's account is an example of an explicit narration of events she has experienced and an implicit narration of her subjectivity in relation to the codes of the interview, the context of production of the narrative. I also want to look at an example of a piece of data that is not explicitly narrating experience in order to explain how this too can be analysed as 'narrative'. This example is an extract of class discussion from the West University session on Rousseau. Ned is giving his opinion on Rousseau's ideas:

Ned: Well, his aim is to find a society where you can have freedom, and he's not going to do it.

Alison (tutor): Why not?

Ned: Because as soon' as man's taken out of the state of nature, whatever happens, there's always going to be a certain degree of loss of freedom. He says you gain moral freedom and that can be swapped for the freedom in the state of nature. But it can't. It doesn't really make any sense.

Alison: Why can't you?

Ned: Because it just. Well, because you have to define what freedom is to you, I guess, first of all. But I took freedom in the state of nature to be the ultimate freedom you can have, in terms of basically you can do whatever you want, with no restraints. Not necessarily the best freedom you can have, but the ultimate freedom. And as soon as you put any restraints on how you can act, even though you say, you know, we're within the general will, you're acting in the wrong way, kind of thing. You're acting in a way which doesn't retain your freedom, there's still a constraint.

(West University, Rousseau, p. 10)

Here Ned is not explicitly relating either fictional or actual events. Instead he is asserting, or explaining his conception of freedom. Nevertheless, it is still possible to

interpret this as an example of narration. What is being narrated here is Ned's relationship to the discipline, to the class, and to the institution. In the context of the class, his interventions construct a position of authority in relation to Political Thought, firstly in his strong assertion of the impossibility of Rousseau's project, and then in the construction of his own definition of 'freedom'. This is what I am defining as 'implicit' narrative. The method of interpretation of implicit and explicit narrative is the same. Both involve analysing the way in which the narrative signals, or produces, the social positioning of the speaking subject in relation to the discursive fields within which they are situated. Thus, Rachel's narrative foregrounds, or produces, a feminine identity, within which she is conscious of, and thus constructs excuses for, possible negative associations that may attach to her participation in class. Ned's narrative foregrounds, or produces his identity as a legitimate speaker of the discipline he is studying.

In my analysis of each of these narratives, I have had to use additional stories, or narratives, to produce my interpretations. In the first I am using a story about gender and in the second I am using a story about the relationship between individuals and language. The validity of my interpretations depends, therefore, in some way, on the reliability of these additional narratives and on the validity of their use as a tool of analysis.

### **Narratives as a tool for analysis**

The concept of validity in narrative analysis requires clarification. Validity in research requires that the categories and descriptions you produce within your analysis constitute a plausible representation of your data. Whereas in some types of research, checking validity may be a matter of observation and measurement, in the case of narrative analysis such methods are clearly not applicable. As Polkinghorne explains:

Narrative research, by retaining an emphasis on the linguistic reality of human existence, operates in an area that is not limited by formal systems and their particular types of rigor. (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 176)

This does not mean, however, that narrative research is not rigorous, but rather that it works with a different conception of rigor and of the type of "truth" that is the object of research:

The results of narrative research cannot claim to correspond exactly with what has actually occurred – that is they are not “true”, if “truth” is taken to mean exact correspondence or conformity to actuality. Research investigating the realm of meaning aims rather for verisimilitude, or results that have the appearance of truth, or reality. (ibid, p. 176)

If we are to accept this conception of validity, we need to explain both why ‘the appearance of truth’ might be an acceptable aim for research, and also, how we might recognise this appearance.

Roy Schafer’s account of the psychoanalytic dialogue both reveals the radical limitations of the attempt to conceive of one “truth” in the application of narrative analysis, and also suggests how a conception of rigour and validity might be constructed within such approaches. He describes the way that the deployment of certain concepts within the psychoanalytic dialogue imposes a new narrative structure on the talk of the analysand. For example, the concept of resistance, deployed in the analyst’s interpretation, reconstructs the narrative presented by the analysand. Within analysis, resistance presents as an (apparent) non-compliance with the rules of free association within the psychoanalytic dialogue (Schafer, 1981, p. 41). Schafer argues that the interpretation of resistance can be narrated in a variety of ways within the analysis. The more traditional Freudian narration, Schafer says, narrates such non-compliance as fear of the self-revelation that might lead to progress in the treatment. This fear is interpreted as a ‘force in the mind’, which thus constructs the analysand as the passive subject of animalistic drives. Schafer suggests that alternative ways of narrating the resistance can construct the analysand as a more active, constructive participant in the analysis, ‘as doing something on his/her behalf, something that makes sense unconsciously though it may not yet be understood empathetically by the analyst’:

One young woman’s spontaneously defiant insistence on persistently excoriating her parents had to be retold analytically in two main ways: as a turning away from the unbearable horror of her imagined inner world and as a firm assertion on her part that the problem resided in the family as a system and not merely in her infantile fantasies and wishes. On the one hand, there was a crucial strategy of self-prevention implied in her apparent resistance: as she said at one point, “If I let myself appreciate myself and see what, against all odds, I’ve become, it would break my heart.” On the other hand, there was the analysand’s search for the self-affirming truth of

parental madness. To have thought of her strident analytic activity simply as resistance would have been to start telling the wrong kind of psychoanalytic story about it (ibid, p. 42).

In this example, Shafer suggests that too narrow an interpretation of resistance would ignore the possibility that the patient's judgement of her need to avoid excessively painful confrontations might be an appropriate diagnosis of her current needs. The narration of resistance simply as the refusal of treatment and the more complex account of resistance, in some specific cases, as an act of necessary self-preservation nevertheless start from the same conception of resistance as a failure to conform to the rules set by the analyst for the psychoanalytic dialogue. It is this basic structure that determines the form of the analyst's re-narration of the analysand's account.

The different interpretations of resistance, then, are not necessarily better, worse, or 'truer', than each other: they simply represent different ways of imposing coherence on the narrative being presented. Schafer says: 'In giving these examples, I am not presenting actual or recommended analytic interventions so much as I am making their logic plain'. It is the possibility of revealing the internal logic of the narratives constructed during analysis that, for Schafer, affords it its status as a valid mode of interpretation. Crucially, there are two different levels to the revelation of the mode of analysis that Schafer describes: first the initial narrative structure being imposed on the data, in this case the concept of resistance; and secondly the specific narration of this structure. A rigorous exposition of a narrative interpretation must make explicit both of these stages of analysis:

What have been presented as the plain empirical data and techniques of psychoanalysis are inseparable from the investigator's precritical and interrelated assumptions concerning the origins, coherence, totality and intelligibility of personal action. The data and techniques exist as such by virtue of two sets of practices that embody these assumptions: first, a set of practices of naming and interrelating that is systematic insofar as it conforms to the initial assumptions; and second, a set of technical practices that is systematic insofar as it elicits and shapes phenomena that can be ordered in terms of these assumptions (ibid, p. 26).

The first set of practices described here refers to the identification of events as instances of theoretical concepts. These concepts are the initial assumptions of the practice. Thus, the identification of an event as an instance of 'resistance' is based on a prior

understanding of and commitment to the validity of the rules of the psychoanalytic setting<sup>1</sup>. Without this assumption, the analysand's claim, for example, to have forgotten something, may be interpreted as a simple act of forgetting; their refusal to speak about topics the analyst feels relevant may be interpreted as an appropriate rejection of an intrusive and unhelpful line of questioning. It is only when the rules of analysis are taken for granted that these events are necessarily interpreted as instances of resistance.

The second set of practices described above refers to the construction of interpretations that attempt to build a coherent story out of the specific instances of 'resistance' identified through the first set of practices. The difficulty in attempting to explicate the practices involved in every instance of interpretation with this level of rigour, however, should also be noted. As Schafer's examples of interpretations of resistance suggest, the technical application of the conceptual structure in specific contexts will always produce new narratives and new structures. Schafer observes, 'No version of psychoanalysis has ever come close to being codified to this extent' (1981, p. 26). What I am trying to do here is to provide as full an account as possible of the principles and assumptions underlying my interpretation of my data.

In relation to my interpretation of Rachel's narrative, then, the same two stages of analysis can be identified. First I must have an external criterion for identifying her narrative as an example of gender performance. I will explain the criteria I use for describing gender in the next section of this chapter. This constitutes an initial assumption of my interpretive practice. Secondly, having identified her narrative as a performance of gender, my interpretation of how this specific instance of gender performance must be rigorous and systematic. All interpretations must thus move between externally defined conceptual structures and the specific contextual conditions that must be taken into account to produce a coherent re-narration of the original text.

There are two possible problems with Schafer's account of validity in narrative analysis. The acceptance of a multiplicity of acceptable versions as valid interpretations might

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<sup>1</sup> Juliet Mitchell quotes Freud's own assertion of this same position: 'The assumption that there are unconscious mental processes, the recognition of the theory of resistance and repression, the appreciation of the importance of sexuality and of the Oedipus complex – these constitute the principal subject-matter of psycho-analysis and the foundations of its theory. No one who cannot accept them all should count himself a psychoanalyst.' (Freud, 'Two Encyclopaedia Articles' quoted in Mitchell, 1974, p. 343).

appear to break the link with 'reality' or the actual historical context of the analysand's story. Morris Eagle (cited in Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 180) has argued that accounts such as Schafer's prioritise the persuasiveness of the analyst's narrative over the historical facts of the patient's experience. Within the analytic setting, it is undeniable that the analyst's interpretations rely on the analysand's narration rather than observation of events, and there must, therefore, be a great likelihood that there will be factual inaccuracies in the versions offered by the analyst<sup>2</sup>. A defence against this criticism can be constructed in a more precise explanation of the relationship between the 'historical facts' (as far as they are available) and the persuasiveness of the analyst's narration. The purpose of the analyst's account is precisely to make connections between different parts of the account of reality provided by the analysand, and to suggest where the analysand's account may present reality in a way that is either internally contradictory or that constructs the roles of different participants in events unfairly or unrealistically. The analyst's account must be able to explain any inconsistencies or disproportion in what the analysand has related. The argument for the construction of a 'second reality' in the psychoanalytic narration does not, therefore, ignore the 'facts' of the matter, but it does recognise that the data it is working with is at the level of narration, not at the level of first hand observation. Thus what is foregrounded is the role of the narrator as reliable or unreliable, rather than the events as true or false. And the evidence on which judgements of reliability or unreliability are founded, are conceptions of 'coherence, consistency and comprehensiveness', rather than empirical data about the events:

To speak of an unreliable narrator, one must have some conception of a reliable narrator, that is, of validity; and yet the trend of my argument suggests that there is no single definitive account to be achieved. Validity, it seems, can only be achieved within a system that is viewed as such and that appears, after careful consideration, to have the virtues of coherence, consistency, comprehensiveness, and common sense. This is the system that establishes the second reality in psychoanalysis. The analysand is helped to become a reliable narrator in this second reality which is centred on transference and resistance (Schafer, 1981, p. 47).

The aim of psychoanalysis, according to Schafer, is not to establish a 'true' history of the patient, but rather to transform the patient into a more reliable narrator of their own

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<sup>2</sup> Irvin Yalom's novel, *Lying on the Couch* (1997), provides a very revealing and enjoyable account of how both the unreliability of the analysand's narrative and the fallibility of the analyst are inherent to the analytic relationship. The case histories he presents in *Love's Executioner* (1989) raise similar issues.

history, according to the criteria of the clinical setting. The history related in analysis, he argues, is not the life history of the patient, but rather:

... it is always and necessarily a present account of the meanings and uses of the dialogue to date or, in other words, of the transference and resistance. The account of the origins and transformations of the life being studied is shaped, extended and limited by what it is narratively necessary to emphasise and to assume in order to explain the turns in this dialogue (ibid, p. 49).

‘This dialogue’, the dialogue between analyst and analysand, is thus about the way the analysand, as a narrator, produces a meaningful account of their own history, rather than about the events of the life history itself. It is in this sense that narrative analysis explores the process of production of meanings rather than the ‘primary reality’ that those meanings appear to describe.

Within its own terms, this argument does seem to me to construct a plausible conception of what validity might mean in narrative analysis<sup>3</sup>. The final step that it is also necessary for practitioners of psychoanalysis to justify is the beneficial therapeutic effect brought about through the construction of this second reality. The argument that the construction of coherent narratives helps to explain experiences does not provide evidence of the therapeutic value of such activity that Schafer goes on to claim for it. Eagle makes the obvious, but nevertheless persuasive point:

...merely claiming that creative myths, coherent meaning schemes, narratives are curative and therapeutically effective does not automatically make them so. Whether or not they are in fact therapeutically effective (and if they are, what makes them so) is a crucial empirical question (Eagle, quoted in Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 213, n. 57).

A clear distinction can, and should, be made between the use of narrative analysis as a valid method for establishing a description of the world and the use of narrative analysis as a valid therapeutic practice.

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<sup>3</sup> An additional way of justifying the use of a single source might be to suggest that the notes of the case history built up over the course of the analysis constitute an objective reference point for later interpretations. Thus although there would be no verification of the events external to the clinical sessions, there would be an external source of evidence to validate the analyst’s interpretations of the psychoanalytic dialogue itself. It is this external reference point that is necessary to avoid interpretations that are little more than fantasy.

This examination of the validity of narrative analysis provides me with an approach to conceptualising my own data analysis. There are, however, significant differences between my research and the psychoanalytic setting. Firstly, and most obviously, my interpretations of my participants have no therapeutic role. Secondly, my data is in some ways far more limited than the data available to the psychoanalyst, since I have not had the opportunities to discuss, check and revise my interpretations in a series of discussions with my participants over a period of months or years. It is this intensity and detail of the psychoanalytic relationship, I believe, that makes plausible Schafer's claim for the validity of interpretations made without any external, or third party corroboration. The final difference between my research and the psychoanalytic setting is that my data does come from at least two distinct sources: interview and observation. This means that when, on occasion, my interpretations suggest gaps and inconsistencies in the narratives in my data, I have an external reference for my interpretation. What I take from the conception of validity that Schafer offers is its foregrounding of narratives as the narrators' construction of themselves in the present, with the consequence that this can help to explain the selections and emphases that constitute their accounts. This provides a way of understanding Polkinghorne's suggestion that narrative research is investigating the production of meaning, rather than history, and thus aims for verisimilitude, the appearance of truth, rather than an accurate representation of a life history. In identifying a coherent story to explain an incoherent one, narrative analysis can help us to understand the processes of production of the original story. Thus when I suggested that Rachel's narrative about the Political Thought class might be related to codes of gendered behaviour, I was offering a way of understanding the process of production of what appears to me to be an inconsistent story about her participation in class.

Schafer has also *provided* a precise account of the way prior conceptual commitments shape narrative interpretations and of how this should be made explicit in the analysis. I will try to make some of my own conceptual commitments explicit in the next section.

### **A de-essentialised conception of gender: Bernstein's 'unthinkable' and Lacan's 'jouissance'**

In my interpretation of the two examples from my data that I discussed earlier in this chapter, I suggested that I was applying a story about gender and a story about the



relationship between language and the individual. In fact, the conceptual basis of my analysis brings these two stories together. I am using gendered terminology, the terms 'masculine' and 'feminine', to describe specific positions within language. In this section I am going to outline the derivation of this terminology. I am going to argue that Bernstein's conception of the unthinkable<sup>4</sup> as that which is excluded from codified knowledge, and Lacan's conception of *jouissance* as that which is excluded from the symbolic order, are describing the same empirical object. Bernstein's work, his articulation of the different codes regulating entry into legitimate forms of knowledge, tends to prioritise the role of class in the social production of the unthinkable. In contrast, Lacan's work dramatically foregrounds gender in the production of subjectivity within the symbolic order. I will try to explain why I think that Lacan's gendered vocabulary is both more precise and more evocative than Bernstein's, as a description of the excluded knowledge that both are taking as their object.

Both Lacan and Bernstein are concerned with the way the production of codified meanings – knowledge, language, systematisation simultaneously produces or reproduces the differential positions occupied by social subjects<sup>5</sup>. Bernstein's 'pedagogic device' encapsulates the rules that determine what counts as knowledge in a specific social context. These rules determine the form and status of meanings within society. They also determine which meanings, from all potential meanings, will be excluded. The relationship between potential and actual meanings, or knowledge, he says, is indirect: there is a gap between possible meanings and codified meanings. This gap enables codified meanings to describe objects beyond the context of the experiential meaning potential. In contrast, potential meanings that are not actualised are indistinguishable from the context in which they are experienced:

...if meanings have a direct relation to a material base, these meanings are wholly consumed by the context. These meanings are so embedded in the context that they have no reference outside that meaning ... They lack the power of relation outside a context because they are so totally consumed by that context (Bernstein, 1996, p. 30).

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<sup>4</sup> Bernstein uses this term in different ways at different times. I am referring specifically to his use of the term in 'The Pedagogic Device' (Bernstein, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> There are also, of course, many differences in the overall conceptual frameworks provided by these two theorists. Here I am only interested in this fundamental similarity in the objects they are researching.

Thus, the gap between experience and meaning is essential if a concept, or language, is to wield power beyond its own context. The gap itself, the space between potential and actualised meaning, Bernstein describes as:

... a site for alternative possibilities, for alternative realisations of the relation between the material and the immaterial ... This potential gap or space, I will suggest, is the site for the unthinkable, the site of the impossible, and this site can clearly be both beneficial and dangerous at the same time (ibid, p.30).

The strong boundary between the physicist's laboratory and the mechanic's garage is maintained in a boundary that codifies physics and leaves the mechanic's knowledge relatively embedded in context. Bernstein's 'gap' is a place where the boundaries between the knowledge of the physicist and the knowledge of the mechanic might be weakened. Similarly, the failure to codify the experience of racism legitimates racial thinking. The gap between the experience of subordinated ethnic groups and knowledge that is codified and articulated in policies and institutionalised practices, helps to maintain the position of dominant ethnic groups. These context-bound experiences that constitute the unthinkable can be codified through research or political activism. The gap, then, is both 'beneficial and dangerous' because it both maintains and at the same time offers the possibility of a change in current social relations. The 'unthinkable', for Bernstein, is that knowledge which is context bound, experiential and un-codified. This is precisely how Lacan conceptualises feminine *jouissance*.

Lacan argues:

There is a *jouissance* that is hers (a elle), that belongs to that "she" (elle) that doesn't exist and doesn't signify anything. There is a *jouissance* that is hers about which she herself perhaps knows nothing if not that she experiences it – that much she knows. She knows it, of course, when it comes (arrive). It doesn't happen (arrive) to all of them. (Lacan, 1998, p.74)

This suggestion that woman does not know her own *jouissance*, or orgasm, can easily be misread. It can be (mis)interpreted as suggesting that *jouissance* is mysterious or literally unknowable. This interpretation conforms to stereotypical essentialised conceptions of 'woman' as closer to some primordial, ethereal or non-rational way of being. Diana Fuss makes this mistake when she claims that Lacan suggests that men

who occupy a feminine position are ‘specifically male mystics’ (Fuss, 1989, p. 11). This fails to take account of Lacan’s very precise definition of the mystic. Lacan defines mystics, not as mysterious or beyond rationality, but as those who can reveal what language excludes: ‘It is clear that the essential testimony of the mystics consists in saying that they experience it, but know nothing about it.’ (Lacan, 1998, p. 76). In fact, Lacan is not here saying that male mystics occupy a feminine position, rather, that they, along with some women, are able to identify the way the feminine is excluded from representation. It is on this basis that he claims his own work as mystical (ibid, p. 76). Similar misreadings might be based on the fact that Lacan can appear to be criticising women themselves for their lack of understanding of their own experience, which again can appear to be re-inscribing women in a position of ignorance and passivity:

The plausibility of what I am claiming here – namely, that woman knows nothing of this *jouissance* – is underscored by the fact that in all the time people have been begging them, begging them on their hands and knees – I spoke last time of women psychoanalysts – to try to tell us, not a word! We’ve never been able to get anything out of them. So we call this *jouissance* by whatever name we can come up with, “vaginal,” and speak of the posterior pole of the uterine orifice and other such “cunt-torsions” (conneries) – that’s the word for it! If she simply experienced it and knew nothing about it, that would allow us to cast myriad doubts on this notorious (fameuse) frigidity. (Lacan, 1998, p. 75)

What can we make of Lacan’s use of *jouissance* as the exemplar of the feminine position? If Lacan is not blaming women for their inability to describe *jouissance*, and if he is not suggesting that women are somehow mystical, or outside rational language, what is the point of his crude pleas to women to tell him (us) about their (our) orgasms?

Lacan’s suggestion that in the end ‘we’ (men? analysts?) have to label what women refuse to name – ‘we call this *jouissance* by whatever name we can come up with’ – echoes Virginia Woolf’s ironic question, as she is reading the British Library catalogue of male writing listed under the subject heading ‘women’: ‘Why does Samuel Butler say, “Wise men never say what they think of women”? Wise men never say anything else apparently’ (Woolf, 1994, p. 34). Lacan, too, is demanding to know why men, or psychoanalysts, rather than women themselves, are left to define what ‘woman’ means. His crude references to *jouissance* are, of course, battering away at the social codes that

forbid (open, respectable) discussion of such subjects. It is not Lacan, but the codes of the symbolic order that exclude knowledge of women's *jouissance* and thus exclude woman from the possibility of becoming a whole subject<sup>6</sup>. *Jouissance* is beyond the knowledge of women in precisely the same way that Bernstein's unthinkable is beyond knowledge. It is not that it is essentially unavailable to codification, but the moral codes and interests of the current social order do not provide it with a means of articulation.

It is useful to think a little more about Lacan's choice of women's *jouissance* to exemplify his description of that which is excluded from language. As we have seen, Bernstein describes a similar object – that which is excluded from knowledge – with far less specific or evocative terminology. In choosing *jouissance* as the defining instance of exclusion, Lacan foregrounds the central function of gender in our production of ourselves as (sexed) subjects. To understand this, we should take at face value Lacan's claims about the reticence or inability of women to describe their sexual experience. While it is clearly not true that women do not experience orgasm, it is equally self evident that there is a powerful taboo against women describing their experience of it. It is arguable, however, whether this taboo is as strong now as it was in the early nineteen seventies when Lacan was writing this series of seminars. Since then, along with the production of various studies that codify women's sexual experience there have also been social changes such as, for example, the weakening of codes regulating female sexuality, evidenced in the ubiquitous discussion of sex in women's magazines and the development of, for example, 'laddette' micro-cultures. These developments have shifted the codes within which female sexuality can be discussed and performed, although, arguably, even these new codes still restrict explicit references to women's sexuality to carefully bounded fields within social life. Even in these cases, arguably, women are constructed as the *objet a*, the cause of desire, at least as much as they are expressive of their own desire (Lacan, 1998, p. 92, see also Lacan, 1979, ch. 20). While the extent of the social changes that have taken place in women's lives is debatable, the general picture that Lacan presents of (some) female patients' unwillingness or inability to describe their own experience is still relevant, and is plausible as a description of

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<sup>6</sup> He says, 'if she (woman) is excluded by the nature of things, it is precisely in the following respect: being not-whole, she has a supplementary *jouissance* compared to what the phallic function designates by way of *jouissance*.' (Lacan, 1998, p. 73). Arguably, I suppose, it is indeed Lacan who excludes 'woman', since in the act of describing her, he is fulfilling the '*phallic function*'. He, however, would argue the

many aspects of women's lives today. The fact that women's desire, whether purely sexual or otherwise, should be so thoroughly hidden, ignored, or repressed, suggests that conformity to codes of acceptable gender behaviour is in some way necessary, essential to women's subjectivity. In order to be a woman, there are some parts of experience that must be kept securely hidden and unspoken. Since it is impossible to be a subject without at the same time being a sexed subject, the codes regulating gender behaviour wield excessive power. The lack of knowledge about female *jouissance* and women's inability themselves to talk about the subject, represent simultaneously both production of and conformity with the historically specific gender codes of the symbolic order. Transgressing these codes incurs a loss of femininity, and therefore a possible loss of position as a social subject. *Jouissance* is thus the prime example of that which is beyond language, equivalent to Bernstein's unthinkable, because it reveals what is ultimately at risk in attempting to articulate what is excluded: at risk is a stable position as a gendered social subject.<sup>7</sup>

Women, then, have a lot to gain from keeping hidden that part of their experience that is uncodified, unrecognised within the hierarchies of the symbolic order. Ultimately, the symbolic order dictates that it is far more important to maintain your gender position – masculine or feminine – than any other position. Individual members of the working classes have less to gain from the maintenance of their subordinate position. Similarly, subordinated or oppressed ethnic groups gain less from their subordination. There are, of course, huge risks in transgressing codes of class or ethnicity<sup>8</sup>, but women, in contrast, risk the loss of the primary point of identification as a human subject each time they transgress the gender codes of the symbolic order. As Lacan comments (1998, p. 79), the limit to all meaning is 'provided by the meaning in which you live.' If,

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opposite: that in revealing 'woman's' exclusion from the symbolic order he is in the position of the mystic, rather than in the position of the phallic function.

<sup>7</sup> Judith Butler describes the material effects of this risk in her interpretation of the death of the pre-operative transsexual, Venus Xtravaganza, a participant in the documentary 'Paris is Burning'. The fact that Venus is killed 'apparently by one of her clients, perhaps after the discovery of those remaining organs', demonstrates, Butler argues, the final risk of transgressing gender boundaries within the symbolic order. This, she argues, 'is a killing that is performed by a symbolic that would eradicate those phenomena that require an opening up of the possibilities for the resignification of sex' (Butler, 1993, p. 131).

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, recent accounts by 'working class' female academics of the pain and contradictions involved in taking on new 'middle class' identities, (Walkerdine, 1990b, Hey, 2003), or consider the fate of Delacroix, the black television executive anxious to succeed in white dominated mainstream TV in Spike Lee's *Bamboozled*. See also the personal interpretations of the concept of 'double consciousness' by African American academics in *Lure and Loathing* (Early, 1993).

therefore, his theory suggests that meaning is sexual, that is only so far as the sexual represents the limit to meaning, the limit to being a person or not being a person. In the society in which we live it is possible to recognise someone as a person without reference to their class, or their ethnicity. It is not possible to recognise someone as a person without identifying (or failing to identify) their gender. This is why the women Lacan describes put so much work into repressing any knowledge of jouissance. It is also why the unthinkable, outside, powerless position is most precisely called the 'feminine' position. And this labelling also reveals precisely the additional loss entailed for men, of any class and of any ethnicity, in occupying this position: the uncoded position is inextricably associated with the feminine<sup>9</sup>.

This use of the term 'feminine' is undoubtedly a crude descriptive tool. It is useful for my purposes, to help me to evoke the differential effects of similar marginalized positions on different social groups. I also believe that it is defensible in so far as, at least at the specific level of psychic individuation, it is still plausible to argue that gender is the primary mark of human subjectivity. This does not imply, however, that other levels of analysis, within which the effects of class and ethnicity are rightly prioritised, are any less valid or significant. It has become a truism within sociology that gender is always marked both by class and by ethnicity. There is a wealth of empirical studies that provides support for this position (e.g. Frosh et al, 2002, O'Donnell and Sharpe, 2000, Fuller, 1980, Benjamin, 2000, Mirza, 1998). Literary writing is able to convey insights into the complex and ambiguous nature of the relationship between these reductive social categorisations and subjectivity with, perhaps, more subtlety than sociology<sup>10</sup>. Sociology has to struggle to maintain what Bourdieu describes as 'systematic circumlocution', while the literary mode of representation inherently constitutes the appropriate ambiguities in its layers of interpretive possibilities. Thus

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<sup>9</sup> Additional gains incurred from such feminine performances have been described in a variety of work on gender and education. Shereen Benjamin, for example, has described how gendered performances are consciously produced by female students with special educational needs to manipulate classroom situations and to procure additional teacher support (Benjamin, 2000). Gemma Moss, in contrast, describes weaker boy readers choices of non-fiction texts that are not visually identifiable as for lower ability students as a 'flight from negative proficiency judgments', a strategy which might also restrict their access to teacher support (Moss, 1999, p. 519).

<sup>10</sup> Bourdieu makes a similar point, stating in the final sentence of *Homo Academicus*: 'And only the techniques of the *Bildungsroman* could enable us to show how collective crisis and personal crisis provide each other with a mutual opportunity, how political revision is accompanied by personal regeneration, attested by the changes in vestimentary and cosmetic symbolism which consecrate a total

Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* (1977), an autobiographical account of growing up Chinese American, depicts the glaring conflicts between the demands of Chinese femininity and American femininity, at the same time as maintaining an appropriate sense of ambiguity about the possibility of distinguishing either of these categories without erasing the individuality of her characters. Percival Everett's (2001) novel *Erasure*, narrated by a black American literature professor who claims, 'I hardly ever think about race', situates the narrator's sense of isolation and alienation not only within his refusal to identify with a hegemonic and reductive version of African American experience, but also within his family biography and his intellectual and literary affiliations. Both of these literary works explore similar territory to the contemporary sociologists cited: both narrators grapple with an insecure sense of their own subjectivity that is to a significant extent attributable to dominant codifications of class and ethnicity. I am not, therefore, suggesting that gender is a more universal or a more effective constituent of either subjectivity or of social exclusion. I would, however, want to argue that it is important to maintain a distinction between the analytic categories of gender, class, ethnicity and sexuality, in order to better understand the different ways such exclusions may be experienced at an individual level. Thus the particular connotations of the term 'feminine' that are consistent with certain effects of marginalized or uncoded social positions can help us to understand the gendered effects of the occupation of these positions.

This conceptualisation of the feminine - as the most evocative and precise way of representing the inability to codify, or the unavailability of a codification of your experience - constitutes a basic assumption within my analysis. This concept is de-essentialised to the extent that it has no fundamental relation to a naturalised sex. As I hope I have explained, the gendering of the concept is based on the contingent but persistent social regulations that both construct women's experience as uncodifiable, and, more crucially, that define sex as the primary mark of subjectivity.<sup>11</sup> In my analysis of the narratives within my data, I am using this definition of the feminine as a stable

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commitment to an ethico-political vision of the social world, erected into the principle of a whole lifestyle, private as much as public.' (p. 193).

<sup>11</sup> Some feminist interpretations suggest that Lacan's system essentialises the relationship between sex and subjectivity. An alternative, equally feminist, and in my view more accurate reading views Lacan as using a necessarily historical, contextual vocabulary to describe a system that might potentially be instantiated with a different first signifier (Cornell, 1995, Ragland-Sullivan, 1986, Rose, 1986).

reference point, in relation to which I can interpret the subjective positioning of participants. I am thus using the concept as if it is an objective structure in relation to which the narratives in my data can be analysed. Both Rachel and Ned's narratives can be interpreted in relation to this conception of gender: Rachel's narrative can be interpreted as distancing her from the codified criteria for success within the classroom, and thus as an identification with the feminine, uncoded position; Ned's narrative, in contrast, positions him not only as someone who succeeds by the criteria of the classroom, but also, in his rejection of Rousseau and construction of his own definition of freedom, as someone who is able to construct his own criteria for legitimate disciplinary concepts.

### **3.3. The objectification of the disciplines**

Objectivism constitutes the social world as a spectacle offered to an observer who takes up a 'point of view' on the action, and who, putting into the object the principles of his relation to the object, proceeds as if it were intended solely for knowledge and as if all the interactions within it were purely symbolic exchanges. This viewpoint is the one taken from high positions in the social structure, from which the social world is seen as a representation (as the word is used in idealist philosophy, but also as in painting) or a performance (in the theatrical or musical sense), and practices are seen as no more than the acting-out of roles, the playing of scores or the implementation of plans. The theory of practice as practice insists, contrary to positivist materialism, that the objects of knowledge are constructed, not passively recorded, and, contrary to intellectualist idealism, that the principle of this construction is the system of structured, structuring dispositions, the *habitus*, which is constituted in practice and is always oriented towards practical functions. (Bourdieu, 1992 p. 52)

#### **Why objectify the disciplines?**

There are two reasons why it is important to construct an explicit objectification of the disciplines. The first is a concern with constructing a full empirical account of observations of higher education classrooms. I have already described my understanding of disciplines as socially situated, and I have supported this description by reference to previous studies by Bourdieu (1996), Huber (1990), and Hyland (2000). However, the objectifications provided in the other work I have referred to do not describe the specific features of the discipline relevant to interaction within the



classroom. Bourdieu and Huber objectify the relationship between social class and discipline, while Hyland objectifies the lexical and grammatical structures used in academic writing to reveal how they are constitutive of interaction within disciplinary communities. Within the classroom, the disciplines are presented in the form of statements, or knowledge claims, which conform to a specific methodology for describing a specific object. I am setting out to objectify the relationship between academic disciplines and student in/exclusion within the classroom. My argument is that the form of academic disciplines constitute relatively stable, socially situated structures that define legitimacy, and thus contribute to student in/exclusion. The stability of these structures is dependent on the literature of the field as well as on the departmental appointments, curricula, reading lists and text-books which influence interaction in the classroom. Interventions within the classroom can then be defined both as constitutive of, and also as either conforming or failing to conform to, these disciplinary criteria. Failure to provide a clear definition of how to recognise the disciplinary status of interventions would mean that the link between the student in/exclusion and the disciplines as socially situated objects could not be established.

It is perhaps worth noting that much work in the field of academic literacies conflates knowledge in the different disciplines into one category of academic language (e.g. Lea, 1999, Lillis, 2001). This loss of the specificity of disciplinary objects and methodologies leads researchers in this field to make what appear to be slightly superficial interpretations of communications between tutors and students. Lillis (2001), for example, is unable to relate her interpretation of essay questions and tutor feedback to any objective account of the discipline. This makes her conclusion, that 'tutors seem to have different views about the nature of the task' (p. 71), and that 'what is assumed to be "common sense" is in fact only one privileged literacy practice' (p. 76), somewhat less than convincing, since it seems likely that the tutors' different comments on an essay question and their assumptions about what constitutes 'common sense' are not merely the result of random privilege, but rather are both related to an identifiable and socially positioned disciplinary discourse. An understanding of these disciplinary discourses and of their structural position within the social would provide a better picture of the nature of the exclusions Lillis is attempting to describe. It is for this reason that I am setting out some of the features of the disciplines before I begin the presentation of my analysis.

The second reason for setting out an explicit objectification of the disciplines is more theoretical. My argument is that in the field of undergraduate studies, disciplines act as relatively objective structures, constructing a reference point, or boundary, for the range of positions available for students to occupy within the classroom. This reference point, then, needs to be defined, in order to identify the way that students position themselves in relation to it. However, in defining disciplines in this way, I am objectifying them, just as Bourdieu has described: prioritising my own 'relation to the object' and ignoring other 'practical functions' of disciplinary statements within their context of articulation (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 52). The paradox of carrying out this act of explicit objectification is that it is both supposed to constitute a convincing object, and at the same time it is supposed to reveal the choices and ambiguities involved in the act of definition, in order to maintain a sense of their status as relatively stable, rather than wholly objective and determining.

Disciplinary statements articulated in undergraduate classrooms are fragile discursive objects that can be conceived of as legitimate or illegitimate only within the specific context of classroom, institution and curriculum. However, here I am defining them as if they exist outside the context of articulation. In describing how to identify the disciplines, I am constructing categories which (appear to) provide rules for the identification of 'the same' object in any context. I am not going to give a complete set of rules for the categorisation and identification of disciplinary statements at this point. More of these rules will be revealed in the development of the analysis. What I wish to do here is to set out the processes by which I have identified some initial features of the disciplines that will be used as a reference point in the first data analysis chapter.

### **Differentiating the disciplines**

Here, then, I am going to define two initial features of the disciplines. The first of these is their contrasting modes of reasoning that I am calling 'metonymic' and 'metaphoric'. The second feature identified here is the different ways that the disciplines construct and use examples.

The difference between metonymic and metaphoric reasoning processes rests on a distinction between core and associative definitions: core definitions provide the

essential criteria for the use of a term; associative definitions identify secondary features and connections that the use of a particular word may suggest, but that are not an essential criteria for correct usage. Alternatively, while metonym is based on a relationship of contiguity, metaphor is based on a relationship of semantic association. Briefly, Political Thought tends to look for 'internal' accounts of concepts: features that can be identified through analysis of core definitions. This can be associated with metonymy because an analysis of core definitions is a movement from looking at a concept as a whole to looking at the parts through which it is constituted. The relationship between concepts is then constructed by taking a part to represent the whole: precisely the structure of metonymy. Although, it should be noted, I am talking about conceptual rather than linguistic metonymy. In linguistic metonymy a word for a part of an object comes to represent the object: 'a hand' represents 'a person'; 'the crown' represents 'the king'. In conceptual metonymy a conceptual part comes to represent the whole concept: the ability to make choices comes to represent freedom; economic equality comes to represent equality. Under this method, ultimately, the acceptance or rejection of a particular conception of a term will usually be made by reference to the intuition of the individual about the core meanings of a term<sup>12</sup>. American Literature, in contrast, tends to develop 'external' accounts of concepts: accounts developed through the analysis of texts that are external to the core definitions of a concept. The development of 'external' accounts of concepts often initiates or develops metaphorical relationships: associations or similarities between apparently unrelated objects. So, for example, reading the story of Noah's Ark initiates a relationship between 'dove' and 'peace', and thus changes the meaning of both terms. In a metonym there are only two components (you move from the whole, to a part of a whole), while in a metaphor, there are three components (the two wholes and the external object through which they are connected).

From this initial definition, it should appear plausible to suggest that metaphorical reasoning is in general a more radical methodology than metonymic reasoning, with

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<sup>12</sup> John Christman (2002) offers a similar definition of the method of Political Thought. He says: 'The reigning method for moral and political philosophy ... proceeds basically by analysing the meanings of key concepts (such as "freedom", "rights", or "neutrality") and combining their analysis with logically structured arguments showing the implications of particular positions using those concepts. Reference to our 'intuitions' is also thought to be important in assessing specific moral principles.' (p. 9).

respect to current understandings of words and concepts<sup>13</sup>. It should also be noted that this distinction between metaphor and metonym is always culturally specific: an external connection, once accepted as obvious or necessary, may be interpreted as an internal or core definition. This has implications for the way it might be possible to understand and describe the political, the conservative or critical, positioning of disciplines using these modes of reasoning.

### **Identifying examples of Political Thought**

The West University discussion of Rousseau can be used to illustrate the category of metonymic reasoning. Rousseau argued that on entering society:

Each (man) became in some degree a slave even in becoming the master of other men: if rich, they stood in need of the services of others; if poor, of their assistance; and even a middle condition did not enable them to do without each other. (Rousseau, 1755, p. 202)

This servitude, for Rousseau, can only be overcome within a participatory political system, as described in his vision of the social contract and the enactment of the general will. In the West University session on Rousseau, articulations of conceptions of ‘slavery’ and ‘freedom’ constituted significant sections of the discussion. Following, to some extent, Rousseau’s account of the lack of freedom in social life as a type of servitude, the students’ discussion of the concepts could be described as an assertion of the equivalence of these two ideas:

205. Lisa: I’m not saying slavery’s good, but to what extent are we ever going to be free? ... I don’t see how you can ever be free in society.  
(West University, Rousseau 2)

Lisa’s substitution of ‘free’ for ‘slavery’ within her initial question, exemplifies the way students tended, at times, to conflate slavery and a lack of freedom in their discussion. This suggests that it is precisely the overlap between the core definitions of these two concepts that is the object of discussion here. The following two short exchanges exemplify this. Very broadly, the question under discussion here is whether freedom

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<sup>13</sup> David Lodge (1986) uses this distinction between metaphor and metonymy to describe the different features of, respectively, ‘modernist’ (radical) and ‘anti-modernist’ (more conservative) writing in the modern period.

exists anywhere, or whether it can be conceived of as an ideal that can guide action even if it can never be fully realised:

231. Rachel: There's different degrees of slavery. What about people who work in factories for like...
232. Michael: Yes, exactly, what about the people who make our footballs in sweatshops.
233. Rachel: Yes, you could say that's slavery. Just because they get paid... (interrupted)
- (West University, Rousseau 2)

Here the lack of freedom in employment that is a component of legal slavery is metonymically equated with the lack of choice produced by the requirement to work for subsistence level wages. This analogy is extended later in the discussion:

253. Lisa: What does a salary do? A salary does the same thing doesn't it? Is that buying you into slavery? What about if your boss can reach you twenty four hours a day on your mobile?
254. Jake: Well, you leave the job and get another one.
255. Lisa: Yeah, but when are you going to find one? What about your pension and all of that?
- (West University, Rousseau 2)

Lack of freedom, in Lisa's intervention described as 'slavery', is now extended to include the self-perpetuating obligations initiated in secure employment. Jake's objection to this, in contrast, suggests the need for a more precise definition of the distinction between core definitions of these two concepts.

The context for this section of discussion was a broader question about the nature of freedom and the relationship between freedom and equality. These questions, addressed throughout the session, were articulated as a question by the tutor:

149. Alison: ... Rousseau wants a free society where everybody is autonomous, but he also wants equality ... and what is coming out here is that there may be a problem between them. But do you think both are equal? Do they have the same ranking in terms of values?
- (West University, Rousseau 2)

In developing an answer to this question, the students come back to the problem of defining freedom, which is where the concept of slavery is introduced. The main basis for the claims in the student interventions I have quoted is the analytic connection

posited between slavery and lack of freedom. Having asserted this connection, the aim is to find a consistent way of applying the terms. This is where a metonymic move is made in the reasoning process. The economic constrictions inherent in slavery – slaves have no property rights and are dependent on their masters for their subsistence – are used, metonymically, to extend the use of the term. The work context, too, is one of the core definitions of slavery. Lisa's suggestion that other kinds of work can be viewed in the same way challenges the limits of this way of conceptualising the equation between slavery and freedom. However, the judgement of whether the examples given are consistent uses of the terms is an intuitive one. The factory worker and the sweatshop worker, and, indeed, the salaried employee, are not in the same position as a legal slave. The implication of the examples is that economic strictures can come to represent the same condition as the legal and physical strictures of slavery: a suggestion that, without some empirical evidence, must be assessed with reference to individual intuition, rather than objective, analytical reasoning alone. The examples, hypothetical examples of slavery based on a metonymic relationship, are used to test out the relationship between slavery and freedom.

The examples introduced into the discussion, then, are used to illustrate, or to test out possible usage of the terms under discussion, rather than to provide evidence of the nature of freedom or slavery as empirical objects. Both of these elements, the search for linguistic consistency and the use of examples as hypothetical illustration, rather than as empirical evidence, are characteristic of the methodology of the Political Thought class. It is these features combined with an essentialised connection between slavery and freedom that constitute the boundaries of the concepts within the class discussion. In another of Rachel's interventions in the same session, for example, the analytic connection between slavery and lack of freedom is the basis for an analysis of her hypothetical example of a happy Roman slave:

239. Rachel: And also, I'm not saying that I agree with slavery, but surely, like, in Roman times, when there were slaves. You can have happy slaves. (laughter). No, but, you're all laughing now, but slavery didn't necessarily mean misery. And yet there were people who were like, free, and yet they were starving. So, were they free? I'm not saying I agree with slavery at all. All I'm saying is: for the person who is starving in the street, looking at the slave who is in a nice house and looking after his master, is he freer than the slave? Or, he might be freer, but does he care? Would he rather be in there?

This intervention begins to problematise the use of slavery as a definitive marker of lack of freedom. The example of the hypothetical happy, well-fed slave displaces the metonymic connection that prioritises 'poverty', as a core definition of 'slavery'. The economic definition is replaced by the legal definition. As a move within political theory, this is an important insight, since it demonstrates how the value you attribute to freedom is dependent on your initial definition of the concept. If slavery defines freedom, Rachel argues, then the prioritising of freedom as a value within a political system can be put into question. This argument is based on the same type of metonymic reasoning as the previous points, but it uses a different core definition, the legal rather than the economic, as its starting point.

This analysis of the metonymic structure and hypothetical examples used within Political Thought constitutes an objectification of the discipline as represented in the classes that I observed. Not all presentations of the discipline or schools of thought within the discipline conform to all of the features that I have described. Marxism, in particular, can be seen as exemplary of a disciplinary boundary, where Political Thought can be recontextualised into other disciplines, such as economics, history, literature and cultural studies. Marxism's distinctive disciplinary position can be traced to some of the ways in which it does not conform to the objectification of Political Thought that I have constructed here. It differs most explicitly in its analysis of the concepts of freedom and equality, which it identifies as inventions of bourgeois morality, constructed to support the interests of capitalism. Thus a discussion of these particular concepts in a class on Marxism would probably not conform to the metonymic structure I have described. Nevertheless, within the classes on Marx that I observed, the general mode of discussion was not very different from the discussions of other theorists: arguments were developed through analytic rather than through associative processes, and although historical examples were introduced, they were either hypothetical or anecdotal, rather than based on an analysis of textual evidence. There are, then, enough similarities between the presentation of Marxism and the presentation of other theorists, within the Political Thought classes that I observed, to enable me to suggest that my objectification of the discipline provides a reasonable reference point for the analysis of student positions.

The objectification carried out here identifies interventions as examples of the discipline in relation to a-contextual categories: it foregrounds the disciplinary features of the interventions, rather than features of the interventions as subjective positioning of the speaker. An examination of the contrast between these features of the discipline and features of American Literature will help to clarify the nature of these disciplinary features as, to some extent at least, specific to Political Thought.

### **Identifying examples of American Literature**

The discussion of conceptions of slavery and freedom in the North University American Literature class exemplifies the difference in the methodologies of the two disciplines. The two texts under study, the slave narratives of Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass, raised issues relating to literacy and sexuality that initiated associative conceptualisations of freedom and slavery:

Why does the slave ever love? Why allow the tendrils of the heart to twine around objects which may at any moment be wrenched away by the hand of violence?

(Harriet Jacobs, 1716, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, )

“If you teach a nigger (speaking of myself) how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave...” ... I now understood what had been to me a most perplexing difficulty – to wit, the white man’s power to enslave the black man. It was a grand achievement, and I prized it highly. From that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom.

(Frederick Douglass, 1845, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself*, p. 2054)

The associative conceptualisations of slavery initiated in these texts were explored in the North University sessions.

The slave narratives studied within American Literature constitute empirical evidence of the experience of slavery. The American Literature class discussions of slavery as a concept are therefore, necessarily, more empirically and less theoretically oriented than the discussions in the Political Thought class. The discussion in the American Literature class is not about the theoretical possibility of maintaining freedom of the individual



within the state. It is, rather, about the historical meanings of slavery as an institution in the United States. These historical meanings provide the opportunity for the development of metaphorical, associative understandings of the concepts of freedom and slavery. The following section where the teacher, Duncan, is feeding back from small group discussions, illustrates this. Duncan asks whether the students are convinced by Douglass' suggestion that control over literacy is a key component of slavery. Sevket emphatically agrees:

6. Duncan (tutor): I want to find out ... whether you were surprised by the emphasis given to literacy within Douglass' account, and whether you think that his account was plausible. Whether you think literacy can be as important as he makes it out to be? ... does that basically make any sense as analysis of how slavery was working?
7. Sevket: Definitely. Because, we were saying, knowledge is power. If you don't know any better, if your level is so low, like, you're de-humanised, you aren't going to know any better to achieve any higher. But we're just looking at the line, 'the more I read the more I was led to abhor and detest my enslavers'. The more knowledge you get about what's going on.
8. Duncan: Okay, right. And was the narrative as such, did the way in which events played themselves out corroborate that idea?
9. Sevket: Yes, because he kept talking about different examples of cruelty, so he was getting knowledge, life knowledge. And then he was getting (can't hear) knowledge, so he could put it down for us to see. Now we know what happened. So it's not only what he learnt himself, but he's teaching other people.

(North University, Slave Narratives)

The relationship posited here between literacy, freedom and slavery is an exemplary contrast to the relationship between freedom and slavery discussed in the previous section. The methods offered by the two disciplines constitute two quite different approaches to constructing such relationships. Whereas in Political Thought hypothetical examples are used to develop a consistent framework based on metonymic relationships between the core definitions of concepts, in American Literature the empirical example introduces connections between concepts and apparently unrelated phenomena: literacy, or illiteracy, can be suggested as in some way definitive of slavery, despite the fact that it is not a core definition. The core definitions of slavery would make no reference to literacy, and, similarly, definitions of literacy would be unlikely to refer to either slavery or freedom. The extract of discussion quoted above can therefore be defined as an example of metaphorical reasoning because it prioritises

an associative connection between literacy and slavery over core definitions of the terms.

A similar type of account is constructed in the discussion, in the same session, of Harriet Jacobs' narrative. A female student identifies a contrast between Douglass' account of his experience as a male slave and Jacobs' account of being a slave girl:

- 64. Mary: We thought that she didn't actually use literacy to become free. We thought it was more her sexuality. She thought that if she had children with Sawyer, he'd free her, and free their children, and all that sort of thing.
  - 65. Duncan: Right, so you think that sexuality functions, perhaps, with Jacobs, the way that literacy does with Douglass?
  - 66. Mary: Well, she thought it would.
- (North University, Slave Narratives)

Jacobs' narrative gives an account of her relationships with three men. The first of these is her master, who continually makes unwanted advances that she rejects. The second is a free born coloured man, who she falls in love with. He wants to marry her and buy her freedom, but her master refuses to allow this. The third man is another white man, whose interest flatters Jacobs. She believes that if she has his children, he will not only buy her, but he will also free her and their children. Her plan is not successful, and her master still refuses to sell her. Nevertheless, as Mary suggests, control over sexuality is given some significance within Jacobs' narrative as a defining feature of slavery. As in the previous example, this section of discussion exemplifies the way that metaphorical reasoning processes prioritise associative over core definitions of concepts.

I want to give one more example, to illustrate the way this kind of reasoning can be identified in discussion of a more explicitly literary text. The East University discussion of *Moby Dick* explored the metaphorical associations between sexuality and power. This part of the discussion began with an exploration of the relationship between Ismael, the novel's narrator, and Queequeg, a harpooner from the Pacific Islands. This relationship develops near the beginning of the novel, when Ismael is staying at an inn, before finding work on a whale ship. The innkeeper tells him that he will have to share his bed with a 'dark complexioned' harpooner, who is currently out trying to sell some embalmed heads he has bought (Melville, 1992, ch. 2). Ismael is very afraid as he waits

for his bedfellow to arrive, and even more ill at ease when he does arrive, and starts performing unfamiliar religious rites before getting into bed with Ismael. However, very soon, the two men develop a liking for each other, and share their bed with great affection. During the class discussion of this incident, the possible homo-erotic implications of this relationship were discussed. One student observed that, in comparison with a heterosexual couple, 'Ismael is Queequeg's wife' (East University, *Moby Dick*, 104). This observation was developed by Hannah, the class tutor, to draw associations between gendered and racial power relations. The student's observation that Ismael, the white man, is in the feminine position is related to Melville's subversion, throughout the novel, of the white man's domination over the black man. This section of the discussion concluded with an analogy between Ismael's position as the dependent partner in his 'marriage' to Queequeg and the white men's dependence on the non-white men aboard the whale ship:

- 114. Hannah (tutor): (...) I think the fact that he (Ismael) is the wife is quite interesting, because if anyone's a hero in this book, it's Queequeg, he's always doing heroic things, he rescues people all the time, and he's this great big kind of heroic superhero, harpooning whales. I mean, the other two harpooners.
- 115. Hamid: One's a red man.
- 116. Hannah: Yes, One's Native American, Queequeg's Polynesian, he's from the Pacific Islands. Who's the third one, can you remember? (...) The third one's Dagoo, he's an African American. So there's a Polynesian, a Native American and an African American, they're the three harpoonists, and they are all huge and heroic. And they also have a really important role to play, they have the main job, they kill the whales. Do you think there might be any significance to that?
- 117. Hamid: With the help of them, it's kind of complementary to the white masculinity. If they weren't there, they couldn't do anything. They couldn't kill the whales, so with their part, with their masculinity, they could do their job, so it's complementary, Queequeg to Ishmael and the rest of the ship, and you can expand it to other things in the universe at the time.

(East University, *Moby Dick* 1)

Hamid's final intervention makes the metaphorical associations constructed within the novel explicit. He suggests that the inversion of expected racial and gendered power structures in the relationship between Ishmael and Queequeg is repeated in the relationships on the ship, which reveal the white man's dependency on the non-white man, and that these repetitions can be interpreted as a critique of contemporary America

and of slavery: ‘... It’s complementary, Queequeg to Ishmael and the rest of the ship, and you can expand it to other things in the universe at the time.’ This interpretation uses metaphorical reasoning processes to identify similar features in different parts of the novel and to construct an association between gendered and racialised relationships at both a personal and a political level. What I have suggested is that the identification of this type of reasoning can be used to define when someone is ‘doing’ literature, in the same way that the identification of metonymic reasoning processes can be used to define when someone is ‘doing’ Political Thought.

### **The comparative legitimacy of these approaches in the two disciplines**

I want to offer one more illustration of the way different methodologies were constructed as legitimate or illegitimate in the two disciplines. The foregrounding of associative over core definitions is consistent with a concern for the effects of language and imagery. The metaphorical reasoning processes that constitute a part of the methodology of American Literature are more suited than metonymic reasoning processes to identify and explore the figurative power of language that constitutes the reproductive force of stereotypes and of racist or sexist language. The final two examples I am going to present here demonstrate this difference in the legitimacy afforded to similar student interventions in the two disciplines.

The first example comes from the North University class on Melville’s story ‘Benito Cereno’ (Melville, 2003). Benito Cereno is the story of a slave ship that has been taken over by the slaves. However, the main part of the story describes an episode where the slaves are pretending that they are still enslaved, in order to hide the truth from Delano, the white captain of another ship, who has come on board. The reader is in the same position as Delano for the first half of the story, and, despite various anomalies on board the slave ship, which make him uncomfortable and suspicious, Delano does not suspect the truth of what has occurred. In its portrayal of Delano’s position, and more generally in sustaining the mystery for the reader, the story repeats stereotypes of black people in a way that the class found disturbing. Jonathan here describes sections of the story that he found uncomfortable, and the tutor, Duncan, concurs that it is possible to interpret some aspects of the text as racist:

41. Jonathan: Just in general, when you talk about animals. Throughout this whole novel, or story, he gives black people also animal characteristics, and not just, they have some human qualities, but at the same time he calls the black women negresses, and that's like lioness. And there's, on page 2293, he's talking about how the hands are like paws, and that, in this story, I felt kind of bad because it was (can't hear).
42. Duncan (tutor): Right. This is a sort of animalisation of black people, isn't it? Those ideas are certainly being given forward (...) There are various stereotypes that circulate in the text and it's not always clear to what extent they belong to the narrative or whether they are what the narrative is critiquing, if I can put it that way. And I think the sort of disagreement, not disagreement, but the uncertainty in the room about that issue is good as a response to the text, because I think there is that uncertainty. (to another student) Catherine, that worried you? You thought it was harmful, it was racist?

(North University, Benito Cereno)

Jonathan's analysis of the language of the text appears to suggest that this kind of representation is inherently harmful, regardless of context. His intervention (41) implies an inherent process of metaphorical effectivity that is set in chain by the use of animal characteristics to describe black characters in Melville's story. In this case, the effects of the metaphor move from a, plausibly unobjectionable, identification of a similarity between a human being and a lioness to further, and more objectionable associations, which are the basis of the claim that this use of figurative language can be seen as politically dangerous, or racist. Jonathan's suggestion is taken seriously within the American literature class, and the same issue is raised several times in relation to different aspects of the story.

An extract from the West University Political Thought class demonstrates the different legitimacy afforded to this type of reasoning in the two disciplines. Here Michael attempts to evaluate Mill's use of language using similar reasoning to that used by Jonathan in the American Studies class:

111. Lisa: I think Mill says barbaric society is okay if you have a despotic government. Whereas a society where you can actually sit down and discuss things, you should have this...
112. Michael: A racist argument, basically.
113. Alison: It doesn't have to be directly racial. But yes, it's built on the idea of progress and the enlightenment.
114. Michael: But he talks about barbarians.
115. Mark: You can have barbarians and free intelligent people of the same race.

116. Michael: But barbarians are ethnically inferior, right?
117. Alison: No.
118. Mark: No. Does barbarian have an ethnic definition? It doesn't. Historically, perhaps.  
(West University, Mill)

Michael's suggestion that 'barbarian' signifies racial inferiority interprets the term as having metaphorical connotations beyond the neutral designation of 'people not open to reasonable debate'. Mark's refutation of this interpretation (118) suggests that it is possible to distinguish between essential, or core, definitions and historical, context specific or associative definitions, and implicitly prioritises core definitions over associative ones. Alison, the tutor, appears to concur with Mark's prioritisation (113 and 117). This marginalisation of an issue that constituted a major section of the discussion in the American Literature class can be explained in relation to the metonymic processes that, I have suggested, constitute the main mode of analysis in the Political Thought class. It can also be related to the object of the discipline: the relationship between the state and the individual. An exploration of the metaphorical connotations of Mills' writing would not respond to the substantive questions about Mill's political ideas that are the main focus of the class. This effect of the disciplinary methodologies and objects in legitimising or failing to legitimise interventions within the classroom will be explored in more detail in the next chapter.

### 3.4. Conclusions

This chapter has set out two different modes of analysis. The first mode of analysis interprets a piece of data as representative of a context, and of the positioning of the speaker as a subject within that context. This is my definition of narrative analysis. I have also explained the de-essentialised conception of the feminine, as representative of those positions that are uncoded within the structures of the symbolic order. I am using this definition of the feminine as a reference point, as if it is an objective structure, in my analysis of the subjective positioning of individuals within narratives.

The content analysis of the disciplines identifies data as representative of categories that are independent of the context, and thus constitutes the disciplines as if they are

objective structures. I have outlined some of the disciplinary features that will be used to identify American Literature and Political Thought as objective structures in relation to which students position themselves within the classroom. However, as I have indicated, it is the process of analysis that constructs these disciplinary features as if they are objective, when in fact they are historically, geographically and institutionally contingent. This self conscious objectification is legitimate because the disciplinary structures are indeed *relatively* stable, and do in fact act as a point of identification for both students and teachers.

### **DEFINING THE MARGINS OF THE CLASSROOM: DISCIPLINARY METHODOLOGIES AND GENDERED SUBJECT POSITIONS AS BOUNDARIES TO CLASSROOM INTERACTION**

#### **4.1. Introduction**

In this chapter and in the following two chapters I am describing the array of subject positions available to students within the classrooms that I have observed. In this chapter I am going to describe marginal classroom positions. In the following two chapters I will describe the array of 'included' positions available for students to take up within these margins. The marginal positions that I am going to describe here define the boundaries of legitimacy within structures of disciplinary methodologies and how these structures inter-relate with structures of gender.

The first two marginalized positions that I am going to describe are structured in relation to disciplinary methodologies. In the previous chapter I identified some tools for describing disciplinary methodologies through their use of empirical or hypothetical examples, and their development of metaphorical or metonymic relationships between concepts. I am going to use the examples of two students, one from Political Thought and one from American Literature, to exemplify how marginalized student positions are produced in the failure to conform to the appropriate disciplinary methodologies. However, this disciplinary marginalisation is mediated, and possibly, in the case of the two male students described here, mitigated, by the simultaneous positioning of students within structures of gender. Another structural feature revealed in discussion of these marginal examples is the contradiction that sometimes exists between legitimate disciplinary methodologies and the avowed pedagogies of the tutors.



The third example of a marginalized position foregrounds the relationship between gender and language, and the marginalisation of certain 'feminised' subject positions within institutional and disciplinary structures. The 'feminine' position is that which is uncoded and therefore unrecognised within the context of the classroom. The example described exemplifies a marginalized 'feminine' position as one from which the subject is unable to produce their own language, and thus either fails to speak or borrows from the dominant language in an attempt to construct a coherent identity. I will suggest that the requirement to construct a language that can unify personal and disciplinary positions is peculiarly marked in relation to Political Thought, because its methodology prioritises the articulation of conceptual convictions unmediated by reference to external texts or data.

The marginalized positions that I am describing can be identified in contradictions between the subject and discourse at different levels. In relation to the discipline, these contradictions can, at one level, be described as a result of the selection that takes place in the transmission of segmentally structured disciplines (Bernstein, 1996). The effects of this selection are slightly different in each discipline. In the Political Thought departments, the institutional or tutor prioritisation of, respectively, Liberal or Marxist perspectives can, in some cases, be seen to marginalize students with a strong prior conviction to an alternative position. In the East University American Literature class, the foregrounding of politicised interpretations of texts and of egalitarian approaches to the analysis of gender, sexuality and racial thinking can be seen to marginalize students' attempts to interpret texts using more traditional or conservative paradigms for literary criticism. Thus it is possible to identify conflicts between the methodology of the discipline and the methodology used by individual students to support their claims. At the level of gender, contradictions that act to marginalize students can be identified both in the expected mode of participation or interaction with the discipline, and in students' identification either with or against the discourse of both the discipline and the tutor. This combination of factors will determine whether it is possible for the student to produce a coherent, articulated subject position, within the specific context in which they arise. This in turn suggests, or can be used to define, a contradiction between uncertain or divided student subjectivities and the requirement to produce a unified position from which to speak within the classroom.

## **4.2. Marginalisation of a dominant student: Michael, West University Political Thought**

In the West University Political Thought classes, Michael spoke by far the most frequently. In one typical session (Hobbes and Social Contract Theory) where there were ten students present plus the seminar tutor, all of whom contributed more than once to the discussion, Michael contributed 125 out of a total of 380 interventions during the hour-long class. He would respond almost instantly to the tutor's questions, which made it difficult for other students to articulate a response before him. He would also frequently interrupt both the tutor and other students. The speed and frequency of Michael's interventions, it could be argued, also appeared to make it difficult for him to organise his thoughts coherently: his individual contributions were frequently confused and imprecise. However, there was significant consistency in the overall political position he articulated throughout the course. This position might be described broadly as representative of critical-left politics: he criticised liberalism and descriptions of politics based on the individual rather than on class, and he viewed liberal political systems as working in the interests of those in power. He also viewed both West University and the Politics Department tutors as a part of, or complicit in, the liberal establishment that he was criticising. There was some basis to his description of the University and the Department as a part of the liberal establishment: the Political Thought lecturers were academically positioned within contemporary liberal thought; and option modules the department had previously run on Radical Political Thought had recently been cut.

Michael's inclination to participate combined with his explicit criticism of the course makes the contradictions in his position particularly visible. In this section I will try to describe the precise nature of the contradiction between Michael's personal political position and the disciplinary language of the West University Political Thought course. I will also suggest that Michael's strong identification with or against some of the set authors on the course represents how this position is mediated through gender, and therefore not describable in purely disciplinary terms.

The first example I am going to describe exemplifies the inconsistency between Michael's interventions and the framework for class discussion provided by the lectures, the set reading and the interventions of the class tutor and other students. In the class on Mill, the discussion of whether pornography can be said to contravene Mill's harm principle<sup>1</sup> developed into a discussion about other parameters on state intervention. It was suggested that the state has more right to intervene in cases involving children, or people identified as having a mental illness or learning disability, than in cases involving responsible adults. The question posed by the tutor, just before this extract, is: which groups of people might qualify as special cases in this way? Several students respond. The first two audible responses suggest possible ways to define which groups the state should consider as responsible for themselves. Then Michael, in contrast, suggests that this act of definition is in fact always determined by the interests of the specific state involved:

- 92. Several: (can't hear)
  - 93. Mark: (...) do they have to choose their government, if not...
  - 94. Rachel: When they can't fend for themselves, basically.
  - 95. Michael: No, the question is before that, the question is, if I'm individualistic, society will think that I'm insane. That's what being an individual means, and the whole thing about ...
  - 96. Alison (tutor): How far can you take your individualism?
  - 97. Michael: Mill says, as long as you don't harm anyone else. But the problem is that if you're holding up a sign saying 'I love Osama Bin Ladin' then people will say, no, you're (can't hear) our children. Or they will say lots of things and they'll probably hang you, so. But for Mill, that would have been okay. And he doesn't actually talk about this point...
  - 98. Mark: The question is to what extent do we take the limits of harming someone? If someone preaches in the street, 'go fight in Afghanistan, go save your brothers and kill Americans', the question is, does he directly harm the people who are going to go to Afghanistan, or indirectly, the American soldiers...
- (West University, Mill)

The issue I want to explore in relation to this extract is the positioning of Michael's interventions (95 and 97). Michael is questioning the basis of this section of discussion, arguing that the definition of 'insanity' is dependent on, rather than a condition for, the definition of citizenship. Further, he suggests that any expression of individuality will

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<sup>1</sup> Mill's harm principle states that the only justification for state intervention in the liberty of the individual is to prevent harm to others. See, Mill, 1859

be categorised by society as insanity, 'if I'm individualistic, society will think that I'm insane' (95). The tutor's response (96), 'How far can you take your individualism?' does not acknowledge the precise point Michael is articulating here: from what Michael has just said, he clearly thinks there is no room for individuality. Thus, I would argue, the disciplinary knowledge claim he is making is effectively marginalized within the class discussion.

This lack of response can be related to the metonymic structure of knowledge claims within the Political Thought class. The tutor's introduction of the example of people with mental disabilities was based on the core definition of mental disability as a lack of reason. This is then distinguished from the definition of a responsible citizen as an agent capable of reasoned action, since reason, or lack of reason, is a core definition of both terms. What Michael says, however, challenges the use of reason as a core definition of insanity and thus undermines the structure the tutor has attempted to impose on the discussion, and, further, undermines the position of reason as a primary, universal value on which to base a theory of government. This is contrary to most liberal approaches. The course handout for the Mill lecture, for example, states, as if categorically:

Mill's defence of freedom of speech is incomplete, flawed in some ways but appealing in others as it rests on the view that human beings are rational, and as such capable of making up their own mind about moral, philosophical and aesthetic issues.

(West University, lecture notes)

What is assumed to be appealing is the fact that Mill's theory is based on 'the view that human beings are rational', a view whose significance is undermined in the suggestion that judgements about rationality are socially constructed. While students are free to argue with the position articulated in the course handout, it does nevertheless constitute a part of the regulative framework of the course. Michael's position at this point is similar to his position in the example quoted in the last chapter, when he argued that Mill's use of the term 'barbarian' is 'racist'. In that example, while Michael was referring to the social and historical construction of the term 'barbarian' as used to objectify other ethnic groups, the immediate responses given by Alison, the tutor, and Mark, another student, referred back to core definitions within which the term 'barbarian', they suggested, 'doesn't have to be directly racial' (Alison, Mill, 113).

Here, Michael is suggesting that the meaning of 'insanity' is also socially constructed, in such a way, he argues, as to define those the state disagrees with. In both cases he is looking beyond 'core' definitions to provide an account of the meanings of words. His comments are clearly not excluded or silenced, but they are marginalized in relation to the framework, the methodology and central assumptions, of the course.

In the extract of discussion of Mill quoted above, the contrasting interventions of the two students are exemplary of contrasting methodological approaches. While Alison's response is fairly neutral, it does not directly acknowledge what appears to be Michael's central point. In the next intervention (97), Michael re-iterates his point in relation to a current political example, suggesting that support for Bin Ladin is socially constructed as criminal or insane. Implicit – though poorly articulated - here is the suggestion that what counts as harm is socially constructed, not an abstract concept. This argument, as Michael suggests, constitutes a serious problem for Mill's harm principle. Mark's response (98) ignores this implication of Michael's intervention, and, in contrast, begins to explore how the harm principle could be articulated to account for the scenario Michael has introduced. These constitute two quite different approaches to an analysis of Mill's thought. Mark is examining the possibility of interpreting Mill as an internally coherent system. In contrast, Michael is constructing an externalist critique, based on the argument that Mill's basic premise - that a conception of harm can be constructed to guide government - is flawed. Further, Michael's rejection of Mill's premise might also be construed as a rejection of the premise of much of the political philosophy studied on this part of the course: i.e. that it is possible to construct a theoretical justification for government. Michael explicitly rejected this position during another session, arguing, 'When you're in government you do what's best for your interest: you tell everyone you're following your ideals' (Rousseau 2, 182). While Mark's approach is framed within the agenda of the course, lecture and the suggested reading, Michael's response does not conform to the framework of legitimate knowledge offered by the West University Politics department<sup>2</sup>. Because of this, within the Political Thought classroom

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<sup>2</sup> In her research in the field of academic literacies, Lea (1999) describes students in a similar position, i.e. where their prior experiences and/or political commitments put them in an oppositional position in relation to their course. She, too, suggests that the conflict between students and the knowledge presented on their courses are 'concerned with issues of epistemology' (p. 116). However, she does not present a detailed analysis of the different epistemological assumptions of the discipline and the students, and while she is sensitive to the social positioning of the student, she is less explicit about the way the discipline, too, may be socially positioned. This lack of recognition of objective contradictions between the position

Michael is forced to occupy an uncoded, feminine position. This position appears to cause him some discomfort.

This discomfort was evident in Michael's frequent articulation of his awareness of the misfit between his position and that of the course. He raised this issue on several occasions during my observations, arguing that discussion of some points of view was not encouraged on the course. I introduced Michael's suggestion in my interview with the course co-ordinator. The particular instance we discussed came during the discussion of the essay question on Hobbes' understanding of moral obligation. The class tutor had initiated a discussion on the difficulties involved in constructing a definition of morality, and Michael contributed the following point:

149. Michael: I think the problem is that living with this system which uses morality to justify itself, the political system disallows you to question that too much, and as such you can't redefine morality because it would completely ruin the legitimation of the current system. So that question is so politically charged that I wouldn't go near it, is what I'm saying. And that's why we're not supposed to discuss morality in this class, because they don't really want us to think about it too much.

(West University, Hobbes and Social Contract Theory)

In her response to Michael's suggestion in the final sentence that there are some things the course does not encourage the students to discuss, Cheryl, the course co-ordinator, appears emphatic in her rebuttal<sup>3</sup>:

Cheryl: That's bullshit. You know, if that's the impression he goes away with then either he has failed to see what the point was, I mean the point is exactly the opposite, or we collectively have really failed to impress on him that we want him to actually question points.

(Cheryl, West University course co-ordinator and lecturer, interview)

The main point Cheryl makes, that the course views critical questioning of ideas as completely desirable is clear, and, I believe, indisputable. However, as she herself suggests at different points in the interview, there are different levels on which such

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of the discipline and the position of the student leads to the production of an oversimplified account of both the observed situation and of possible ways of remedying such exclusions.

<sup>3</sup> N.B. I don't think I introduced the quotation very effectively. If I had explained my interpretation of Michael's point a bit better, she might have responded more sympathetically.

criticisms can be made, and these are not all viewed equally within the course. She positions herself as a political philosopher, someone who, she says, 'will have to be interested in abstract questions, such as what is equality, for example; who will spend more time analysing words, looking at the logical relationships between different bits of argument.' And she explicitly rejects some other academic approaches to the material taught on the course:

Cheryl: Continental philosophers would not only focus on the history ideas, but they also would not, if you went to a lecture on Locke in Paris it would be completely different from the one you attended here. Continental philosophers do not like pointing to contradictions, internal contradictions in a big philosopher's work. For all sorts of reasons. You would go away from a lecture on Locke in Paris thinking that Locke is one of the most coherent thinkers to have existed. Whereas I try to convey the impression that his argument, in particular about property, is riddled with problems.

(Cheryl, West University course co-ordinator and lecturer, interview)

Here Cheryl is very explicit about her preference for a metonymic analysis of arguments. What she is ideally looking for is an analysis of the internal coherence of the theories and concepts articulated by the philosophers studied on the course. Michael's argument against Mill, contrarily, does not address the *internal* coherence of Mill's harm principle, but the premise on which the development of the principle is based, which, more importantly, closely resembles the premise of the whole course: that it is possible to construct rational justifications for government policies. Arguably, then, his whole approach is inconsistent with the discipline that Cheryl is setting out to teach. Further, if teaching is believed to have any effect, then the approach taken in the lectures and the seminars must have some sort of regulative function. The reading lists, the lecture course and the seminar discussions are based on the Political Theory/Political Philosophy approach to analysis that Cheryl has described. Other approaches, while not explicitly 'disallowed' as Michael tries to suggest, are not supported within the framework of the course. A student who feels more comfortable with an approach to analysis that does not come within the framework of the course must put in extra work to construct arguments consistent with their own position.

Michael's discomfort in occupying an uncoded, feminised position in relation to the course was also symptomised in his explicit and personal rejection of the position of the (female) course lecturer and, perhaps, his concomitant identification with Hobbes and Marx, the two set authors he found most persuasive. The West University course was divided into the lecture, given by the course co-ordinator, and the seminar, taught by a different tutor, a postgraduate student. This division of labour possibly facilitated Michael's objectification of the position of the course co-ordinator, since he didn't ever hear her articulate and refine her positions in discussion or in response to his objections. These objections were made explicit several times during the observed sessions, perhaps most dismissively during a general discussion of the course at the beginning of one of the sessions:

Michael: (...) In the Hobbes lecture Cheryl was saying 'this is wrong'...

Rachel: Yes, she didn't like Hobbes very much.

Michael: She didn't like him, but that was irrelevant to the situation. The fact that she didn't like him is a fact that is of no interest to me whatsoever. She was not engaging with the actual argument.

(West University, Marx and Engels)

Michael's presentation of himself as able to judge, and therefore equal, if not superior to his lecturer, has connotations of both class and gender positioning. Although he claims to be making a statement about the argument, in fact Michael's statement that Cheryl's opinion is 'of no interest to me whatsoever', is at least as much a personal as an academic judgement. His discussion of Hobbes is similarly personalised. At the end of a lengthy discussion of an exam question on Hobbes, Michael observes:

20. Michael: (...) I think if you defend Hobbes in that question they'll fail you, personally.

21. Alison (tutor): No, it's not defending Hobbes (...)

(West University, Hobbes and Social Contract Theory)

The question under discussion is 'Does Hobbes understand political obligation as a moral obligation to abide by the covenant?' This is an exegetical question about different possible interpretations of moral obligation in Hobbes' thought. It does not imply an attack on Hobbes' position, in the way that Michael suggests (20). This kind of personification of arguments as their authors is not uncommon. However, in this case I think it is possible to interpret Michael's strong personal identification and rejection, of



Hobbes and the course lecturer respectively, as symptomatic of his position within the course.

Michael's rejection of the course lecturer and his identification with Hobbes, then, can be read as signifiers of positioning within structures of gender. While it would be precipitate to read the single instance of Michael's vehement dismissal of the lecturer's opinions as 'of no interest to me whatsoever' as evidence of sexism, when this instance is read in juxtaposition with other comments about female teachers made by male students during my study, the case for a gendered interpretation can be made more persuasively. For example, another male student in the same class, perhaps accurately but also dismissively, identified Alison, the class tutor, as a student on a similar level to the rest of the class: 'We're not philosophers ourselves, maybe Alison will be sometime, but not yet'. These comments, taken together, and especially when read alongside the more explicitly sexist comments made by Edward, in the East University American Literature class (see next section of this chapter), suggest that the gender of the tutor is not irrelevant to the way male students position themselves within the classroom.

These observations of male students resisting occupation of feminine positions, or subordination to female tutors, are consistent with studies of gender differences in a range of disciplines (Walkerdine, 1998, pp. 63-64, Millard, 1997). Elaine Millard, for example, argues that 'from an early age, most boys can be shown to fear the 'contamination of femininity' (ibid, p. 26). In Michael's case this threat of contamination with the feminine comes from two sources: firstly his occupation of an uncoded position in relation to the discipline of Political Thought within the West University course; and secondly in the requirement that he defer to the authority of a female lecturer. As I suggested in the previous chapter, then, Michael's identification with the legitimate, codified position occupied by Hobbes can also be read as a move within gendered linguistic structures.

In a very different context, Jacqueline Rose argues that sexuality is central to Elliot's conception of artists' development of their identity as artists:

Only by capitulating to the world of dead poets can the artist escape his oppressive individuality and enter into historical time (...) Just as in the psychoanalytic account, the son pays his debt to

the dead father, symbol of the law, in order fully to enter his history, so in Elliot's reading the artist pays his debt to the dead poets and can only become a poet by that fact. Elliot's conception of literary tradition and form could therefore be described as a plea for appropriate mourning and for the respecting of literary rites. (Rose, 1986, p. 129 – 130)

What Rose is suggesting is that the mode of engagement with a tradition that demands conformity, respect, and 'mourning' for that tradition is analogous to the moment of entry into the symbolic order, at which point the infant must identify with and re-iterate the existing regulative order. This identification is gendered, because the existing regulative order is that of 'the father', patriarchy, and the subordination of feminine positions. The deference to dead artists is personal, as well as purely academic or artistic, since it is a mechanism by which the living artist can take up a position within a recognised tradition. Michael's personalisation of his defence of Hobbes can thus be read as a gendered move, in which he positions himself in identification with a dominant academic tradition and thus marks out a place from which to speak as a subject and creator of language. This position, while not necessarily 'male' can, within the Lacanian framework I have set out, be described as 'masculine'. As you will see, this move of identification with a critical tradition and against a female lecturer is repeated by Edward in the East University American Studies class.

What I am suggesting is that while Michael's disciplinary interests are marginalized within the structure and methodology of West University Political Thought, this marginal, feminised position is mediated through Michael's identification with masculine codes that enable him to construct a coherent subject position from which to speak.

#### **4.3. On the margins of the discipline: Edward, East University American Literature**

The American Literature class at East University was a small group. Of nine fairly regular attenders, five were mature, part-time students, and the other four were full time, younger students, two of whom were visiting students from an American University. The two American students tended to sit together, but the other students spread out a bit more around the class, so the fact that Edward also sat apart from the other students

does not necessarily mark him out as 'excluded' or as 'an outsider' in any significant way. He was one of the four or five students who contributed most frequently to class discussions, and was one of only two students who occasionally contributed fairly lengthy interventions. However, his contributions were sometimes quite rambling and difficult to follow, and after several weeks it appeared that the tutor and some of the students had become aware of this. On one or two occasions the tutor interrupted his interventions to say she was having difficulty following what he was trying to say, and in one session, the two American students were giggling as he was speaking.

Edward's ideas are difficult to describe precisely because of the slightly rambling and incoherent nature of his contributions, both in class and in the interview. There are, however, three fairly consistent features of his position in relation to the class discussion of *Moby Dick* that exemplify the disciplinary boundaries of the American Studies class. These positions can be identified in Edward's discussion of masculinity and heroism, of race and slavery, and in his interpretation of *Moby Dick* as primarily an adventure story, rather than as a metaphorical exploration of political issues in American history. Edward's position in relation to each of these issues puts him in conflict with the central approach of the course, the course tutor, and most of the other students. Additionally, it is possible to identify several ways in which Edward identifies with academics and against 'the common man'.

Edward's first intervention in the class on *Moby Dick*, giving his general impressions of the novel, exemplifies his interpretation of the novel as a literal story about men working together on a ship:

40. Edward: (...) Isn't it more about the individual, about his sense of being at work and his interplay with his friends and his work colleagues more than anything else, on the ship. All the other, the dysfunctional images, the homosexuality and all of those things are just ways of tensing the story, I found (...)  
(East University, *Moby Dick* 1)

Edward's description of the book as about 'being at work', and 'his interplay with his friends and work colleagues' identifies the significance of the novel in the literal events of the narrative: the work of the whalers aboard a whale ship. Other issues that had already been raised in the class discussion, such as the suggestion of homoeroticism in

the relationship between Ismael and Queequeg, are described as ‘just a way of tensing the story’, which I take to mean that they are details that might make the story more exciting but that they are not central to the ‘meaning’ of the novel. This literal reading of the events of the novel is consistent with Edward’s interpretation of the text as primarily about heroes, male friendship and men working together. ‘It’s a hero’s world’, he says:

108. Edward: (...) but whatever job has to be done, like they have to go and catch this whale, even though they have this ethical argument about it, whether they should chase this big whale, chase monsters and become this monster and sort of that comes, is a bit beyond. I think it’s important to them that the team, the survival is the team, similarly, I’m the leader, you’re my second man, we can’t have two leaders, it’s that kind of thing.  
(East University, *Moby Dick* 1)

The idea of the heroic is re-iterated in the suggested association between chasing the whale and chasing monsters. The ideas of ‘the team’, ‘survival’, ‘leaders’ and ‘seconds’ can be associated with the ideals of boys adventure stories, or of the hierarchical masculine relationships of sports teams and armies. The suggestion that sections of the book might be read as homoerotic would clearly undermine these ideals of masculinity working together in a heroic endeavour, hence Edward’s description of these images as insignificant and ‘dysfunctional’.

Edward’s interpretation of *Moby Dick* as a heroic masculine adventure comes into conflict with the class discussion of its portrayal of sexuality, and, in a similar way, his conception of ‘race’ and the history of slavery come into conflict with readings of the novel which position it within the abolitionist politics that Melville was involved in at the time he was writing. This conflict was apparent in the second session on *Moby Dick*, when the class was discussing the chapter ‘The Whiteness of the Whale’. This chapter first sets out, and then explicitly undermines the traditional associations of whiteness, arguing:

... for all these accumulated associations, with whatever is sweet and honourable, and sublime, there yet lurks an elusive something in the innermost idea of this hue, which strikes more of panic to the soul than that redness which affrights in blood. (Melville, *Moby Dick*, Penguin, p. 205)

Hannah, the tutor, asks the class to explore the political significance of Melville's discussion of whiteness, and Edward responds. His response introduces ideas that are not wholly consistent with the preceding discussion. He suggests that there is a general understanding that white people were responsible for slavery, and that this is inaccurate, since Africans voluntarily sold their children into slavery:

185. Hannah (tutor): I think it serves a particular kind of political function. I mean, why do you think that's an important association, perhaps, this idea of purity and whiteness?
186. Edward: I think it's the common man's view.
187. Hannah: What's the common man's view?
188. Edward: The common man's view, the working class man's view is that white people were the people responsible for the slaves, which isn't true. I mean, you go to Africa, it isn't true. I mean the families sold their children into slavery. They were paid money for the slaves by the owners, I mean, the only people who, I mean the truth is that the ships were owned by a company, there were ten sailors called marines and there was one captain. And each marine was press ganged, from here, and served on the ship, and on each floor of the ship was 1000 slaves, and each slave was sold by his family...
189. Hannah: No.
190. Edward: It's true.
191. Hannah: No, the network of slavery in Africa was mainly based upon the principle of victors. It's mainly about conflict.
192. Edward: There is that element of it but the emperors sold...
193. Hannah: People did not sell their children into slavery...
194. (...)
195. Hannah: Yes, but what has this got to do with purity and whiteness?
- (East University, Moby Dick 2)

Hannah's categorical rebuttal of Edward's position (189) and, when this fails, her recourse to specialised academic language, 'the principle of victors', that might have precluded a further response, suggests her personal discomfort with the ideas Edward is expressing. Her final intervention (195) both puts an end to her interchange with Edward, and also signals a boundary of appropriate discussion in the American Studies class. Edward's preoccupation with the African slave trade is illegitimate here for a variety of reasons. Firstly, the text under discussion relates to American slavery and the American abolition movement: it is not about African slavery. More precisely, the section of text they are looking at questions the social and linguistic connotations of

whiteness within American slave holding society, while Edward's intervention is about the economic organisation of the slave trade in Africa. More importantly though, while Melville's text attempts to undermine the hegemonic dominance of conceptions of whiteness within language and society, Edward's intervention begins from the opposing position. He suggests that the dominant ideology, the ideology in need of correction, is one of white responsibility for the evils of the slave trade, which he labels as 'the common man's view'. This contrast in approach contravenes not only a disciplinary boundary, but also a pedagogic one. It is a convention of contemporary educational practice that it is a part of the role of the teacher to police certain types of language and beliefs within the classroom. Hannah's explanation of her decision to intervene conforms to this convention:

Okay. There are certain things I intervene with, if I think there's a problem with them, that they may be offensive. Here, I think what he's got is a slightly garbled version of the fact that there was a flourishing slave trade in Africa and that a European slave trade out of Africa couldn't have happened without it. That's not the same as saying that people sold their children. You know, he's kind of doing quite a racist thing here, I think, and it needed checking.

(Hannah, East University, interview)

Hannah suggests that she is correcting both Edward's possible misunderstanding of the history and also an underlying racism in what he is saying. The identification of such racism is not easy. Even in this instance, where I would agree with Hannah's interpretation, the 'racism' in Edward's intervention is not explicit. The underlying racism, I would argue, is evident in his over-generalisation of the practice of families selling their children. He says, 'the families (rather than 'some' families) sold their children into slavery', and similarly 'each slave was sold by his family'. Racism might also be identifiable in his concern about the 'misrepresentation' of white people as responsible for slavery, although, factually, his claim that less is known about the African slave trade than is known about the European slave trade might well be correct. While Hannah cites both factual inaccuracy and racism as reasons for intervening, it is the nature of the discipline of American Literature that defines the form of her intervention. Hannah brings the discussion back to the linguistic issues relating to *Moby Dick*, while in a History class on the topic of slavery, for example, the correction of the factual inaccuracies in Edward's account might have been prioritised, and this

might also have enabled some of the racist features of what he is saying to be addressed more directly.

Edward's preoccupation with issues of 'race' and slavery was also evident during my interview with him. He spent a long time telling me about a trip he went on to the Gambia, where he had learnt, or confirmed, much of his knowledge about the slave trade. His pre-occupation with race was also evident in other ways. For example, when I asked him to summarise the previous week's session, the session which included the extract quoted above, he began by saying, 'It was interesting that the two black members of our session couldn't turn up for it'. In a different context, when asked to explain what it means to study English Literature, Edward again returned to issues of ethnicity, here specifically in relation to the global linguistic dominance of English:

CL: Can you define for me what the study of English Literature is about?

Edward: What's it about? It's about English. It's about communication. All radio (...) Even though in other countries we speak on civilian radio in native languages, in all radio communications of any kind that are a controlling influence, so in airplanes (...) it's legally bound by international laws to be spoken in English (...) So, English for me, the study of English, the honest degree in English tells me what was special about English that people really wanted to keep alive, ethically, what's English?

(Edward, East University, interview)

What he appears to be suggesting here, what he appears to be looking for from his studies, is a justification of the dominance of English that is based on the inherent superiority of, 'what was special about', the language, rather than the now more commonly accepted explanation, which suggests that colonisation and exploitation are responsible for the contemporary global economic dominance of the English language. Clearly, if this is what Edward wants, then the English Literature degree at East University is not going to provide what he is looking for. However, later in the interview, in a slightly confused anecdote he also described another aspect of what he hopes the degree can offer him:

You know, you go into a shop and you ask for (...) the paper, and the guy says, instead of saying 35 pence, he says 45 pence. And you sort of think to yourself, 'I'll kill that guy'. You know it's actually 35 pence for that paper, but, you know, people take advantage of you all the time. So I needed some way to actually deal with these kind of speculations. So the degree provided me

with evidence of what that kind of character is coming from and why it's a social problem and how I ethically deal with it, you know, with a laugh and a giggle, and the right sort of appraisal of it. So, in a kind of a way I saw it as that, more as a human skill...

(Edward, East University, interview)

Here, Edward suggests, that he what he wants to learn from the degree is how to better understand and control his responses to situations that he finds difficult to manage. There is, it would seem, a conflict between the objective of an access oriented higher education institution to meet precisely this type of educational need and the more explicitly politicised content of the American Literature course, which necessarily marginalizes the racist elements of Edward's position. What is evident is that the issues that Edward wishes to discuss are not accessible within the codes of the American Literature course, and he is thus forced to occupy a marginal, feminised and uncomfortable position within the classroom.

Edward very explicitly associates approaches to literature that prioritise political issues and issues of 'race', gender and sexuality with Hannah, the class teacher. In describing her reading of the *Moby Dick* he positions Hannah in opposition to other established critics:

I found the analogy between the novel and the whale simple to understand in the one sense, you know, that the novel and the whale are the embodiment of an idea, and that embodiment, the teacher says, is America. The writer doesn't say that. Not all the critics say that. And the critics that wrote about it at the time, the newspaper reviews of the story don't say that ... Politics that are going on around him would have found their way into the writing, he would have found it very difficult not to have, but I don't think he deliberately wrote. I think he wrote specifically about a set of characters that he knew about or had feelings for, making their way through the story of work.

(Edward, East University, interview)

The insertion of 'the teacher says' to modify the description of the whale as a metaphor for America distances Edward from this interpretation. The teacher's position is then opposed to interpretations of other critics and also to Edward's own suggestion that any political references in the book are accidental, and irrelevant to the main story of the novel. Edward's reference to 'the critics' is similar to Michael's identification with Hobbes, and suggests his desire to align himself with academic discourse, and to



distance himself from the ignorance of 'the common man'. Edward made this move of identification with an academic tradition on several occasions during my observations. There is also a clear insinuation here that the teacher lacks credibility as a critic. This insinuation was repeated several times during the interview, for example in Edward's response to a question about the teacher's role and her position within the discipline of English literature:

I think she's very lively. I think she tends to go out of her way to become part of the class. She's quite nice like that. I think that's good. She doesn't, I find maybe, a bit strange, everything in this particular topic is open-ended. I find everything is left open-ended. I find that even in sort of, some of the feminist writings that I'm reading that, you know, everything's open-ended. Nobody's prepared to put their foot down and say what they actually believe in. Like black feminist writers write about how they're excluded because they write about lesbians, et cetera. Ordinary people don't like that, so they won't read it. So you have to sort of think about a story.  
(Edward, East University, interview)

Edward's initial description of Hannah, 'she's lively', she's 'part of the class', and 'she's quite nice like that', emphasises characteristics that are personal and feminine, as opposed to professional and academic. He then attempts to modify the criticism that will follow, saying he finds it 'maybe a bit strange', before sweepingly categorising Hannah with 'feminists', 'black feminists' and 'lesbians', all of whom, he claims, fail to 'put their foot down and say what they actually believe'. This attempt to describe Hannah in terms of a stereotype of women as less decisive and, implicitly, less clear and rational than men is not only crudely sexist, but also inaccurate and self-contradictory when juxtaposed with Edward's previous comments about her interpretation of Moby Dick. Although he described the interpretation of the whale as a metaphor for America as 'simple to understand', which is consistent with his stereotyping of women's, or feminist, ideas, he also identified it explicitly as what 'the teacher says', suggesting that her presentation of the topic was not in fact 'open-ended'. It would appear, then, that the content and methodology of American Literature, which coincide with the academic interests and position of the teacher, combined with the fact that she is a woman make it difficult for Edward to find a position that is consistent with those offered within the American Literature classes.

The West University Political Thought module is methodologically less diverse than East University American Literature, but it offers an explicit range of different political positions with which students may identify. East University American Literature uses a range of different methodologies, but is more restrictive than Political Thought in terms of the diversity of political positions developed and argued for within the course. Whereas in the Political Thought class Michael was able to identify positions that were both in opposition to the lecturer and still a part of the core curriculum of the course, the American Literature module was based on a consistent set of political assumptions that provided no overlap with Edward's political views. Although Hannah, the course tutor, referred to examples of literary criticism that offer alternative accounts, these were generally used to position her own argument rather than being developed and explored on their own terms. In addition, in the American Literature class the explicit overlap between gender and disciplinary content presents Edward with further conflicts to negotiate. Edward's already complicated, sexist, response to his female lecturer is further complicated by the discussion of masculinity and sexuality within the classes. In effect, the course starts from the assumption of a shared prioritisation of issues of equity in relation to 'race', 'gender' and 'sexuality', and because of this it does not explicitly offer a position from which Edward might begin to rationalise or alter his position.

#### **4.4. The construction of a non-participative student: Laura, South University Political Thought.**

Laura is doing Law and Politics at South University. This is the third degree that she has begun. First she did three weeks of a Law course, which she hated. Then she studied music for two years, which she also didn't enjoy. She decided to start again with Law and Politics on the recommendations of friends studying both subjects, and also because she wanted to develop a better understanding of current affairs. She felt that now she was older she would have a better experience than when she first studied law:

I really want to learn what's happening because when I was doing music I felt like I just didn't know what was going on around me, in the news, I just felt like I didn't know anything ... Well, I'm twenty. I'm kind of more organised, I'm not rushing into things as much, and I think now I'm more settled to take on something more academic, more serious about stuff.

(Laura, South University, interview)

Laura seems not to have considered the possibility of *not* doing a degree. She referred to the importance of education several times during the interview, and to the value she attached to the fact that she is educating herself, in contrast with other people who have worked less hard:

... Personally, I think it's all down to education, if you want, say you're working class, if you want to get out of that hardship, it's all down to education, you need to educate yourself to get that far. ... I'm from a working class background and I've educated myself (giggles) I would have gone through education and hopefully I would have got a decent job.

(Laura, South University, interview)

Despite her apparent commitment to education, Laura was not a very active student in the Political Thought classes. Laura asked a question in the very first session that I observed and that was the only time she spoke in class during my observations. In the video of one seminar, Laura is visible sitting next to the lecturer in the circle of chairs, staring down at her desk, silent and apparently unresponsive, throughout the seminar. Laura explained her lack of participation as resulting from what she perceived as the dogmatism of the course tutors, saying:

... When I first started off I thought this is really okay, and I put my point across, and now it's more difficult ... It was just so difficult to put your view across because obviously they (the course tutors) have their own opinions and if you say something they kind of jump down your, not jump down your throat, but say 'no, no, this'.

(Laura, South University, interview)

However, she also identified other problems she was having with her courses. Despite saying that she found Political Thought interesting, and less difficult than Political Institutions, she said that the last two lectures had gone over her head. She evaluated her own performance quite critically and identified specific difficulties she had encountered. She described giving a presentation in her Political Institutions class and thinking, as she was giving the presentation, 'Oh my god, I'm giving a presentation and I don't even know what I'm talking about'. She also explained what she felt had been some of the problems within her presentation:

... The thing is just breaking the information down and the lecturer said I had all the information there, but the thing was selecting the right bits of information. I mean, that I found difficult. So I just went on and on, and I didn't really know what I was talking about half the time and then people were asking questions and I only gave my view, I didn't give other views or opinions, I just thought my own views 'this is all I understand, this is all I know', so, yeah.

(Laura, South University, interview)

It appears that Laura's analysis of her performance is at least partly derived from her Political Institutions lecturer's comments, and, further, it is couched in the language of de-contextualised skills: she talks about 'selecting the right bits of information' and the need to 'give other views or opinions'. There is no evidence here of a connection between these skills and the substantive content of either the discipline she is studying or her own political opinions. This can be interpreted as an example of a displaced, or uncodified feminine subject position: Laura's account of herself uses the terms of a language that is not her own. This interpretation is consistent with Freud's definition of neurosis, or with Lacan's 'discourse of the hysteric'. In both these accounts the subject, unable to negotiate a coherent identity, is excessively reliant on socially constructed regulations. In Freud, this occurs when there is conflict between the ego and the id, and the ego, unable to resolve the conflict on its own, adopts to excess the language of social conventions (Freud, 1986, pp. 563 – 567). In Lacan, the position of the hysteric is produced when the divided subject speaks in the language of the subject supposed to know (Verhaeghe, 1999). The point is that in order to construct a coherent position as a social subject the individual must speak a language that unifies individual desires with socially acceptable codes and languages: in Lacan's terminology, the symbolic order. The failure to do this produces the uncomfortable, and feminised position of the hysteric.

Laura's relatively lucid accounts of her motivations for studying and of the skills that she needs to acquire are not consistent with her disaffection, her lack of understanding during some of the classes, and her hesitancy in expressing her views during the interview. Other parts of our discussion revealed a connection between the difficulties Laura was having with the course and her expectations about the nature of the discipline. Laura's approach to the study of Politics is positioned within her attempts to reconcile her own personal and political positions and her desire to understand 'the

news' and 'what was going on around me', but her experience in the classes is not consistent with these objectives. There are, then, several factors that contribute to the construction of Laura's non-participative position within the class, and these reveal her lack of a secure, codified disciplinary position from which to speak.

I spoke to Laura the week after the class on Hegel and immediately after the class on Marx. I want to describe Laura's positioning in relation to these two sessions, and also in relation to her account of a topic she studied on one of her Law modules. To do this, I want to begin by quoting at length an extract from the Hegel lecture (i.e. not the seminar) that I showed to Laura during her interview. She has a transcript to follow, and also listened to the extract on the video. In her response, she appeared unable to produce any language that might begin to relate to, or make sense of the tutor's text.

I was uncertain whether to refer to the session on Hegel in the interview, since it had been by far the most difficult of the topics on the course. However, in the end I decided that I shouldn't prejudge, especially since Laura hadn't spoken in the class, and so I had no way of knowing what her response would be. The first extract I selected to discuss with Laura, and in the event the only extract we looked at in the interview, was a section where Bill, the lecturer, used the story of *Antigone* to illustrate Hegel's conception of history progressing through contradiction. What I want to do is to examine the methodology of the extract, and then to compare that with Laura's response to the extract during the interview. I am familiar with the story of *Antigone* and have some basic understanding of Hegel's ideas, and I very much enjoyed this section of the lecture. Bill began by offering his version of the *Antigone*:

Let me give an example of a Hegel contradiction. It comes from Greek Tragedy, you'll see the point in a minute. In *The Antigone*, Antigone has a problem, and her problem is that her brother has fallen out with her uncle, and, for good or bad reason, it doesn't really matter, because her uncle is a tyrant, staged a rebellion and lost. Now, why is this a problem? Well, it's a problem because she finds herself confronted by two moral rules which are central to Greek society. The first is that of obedience to constituted authority. This is a moral principle endorsed and supported by the Gods of the state. So here we are in a society, a polytheistic society, where there are many Gods and they're all fairly equal. And the Gods of the state decree obedience to the king. The Gods of the family set certain moral rules about what you're supposed to do about your family. And the king, in order to make sure that the point is made about what happens to

rebels, says, this guy's body must not be allowed to have a proper ceremonial burial, it must be left there as an example to any other would be rebels. The Gods of the family dictate to Antigone that she has to do a proper ceremonial burial. And the reason it's a tragedy is that there is no way out. Whichever she does, she will have offended one lot of Gods, and she will therefore go to a tragic end.

(South University, Hegel, lecture)

Up to this point, I want to suggest, Bill is largely just recounting the story of Antigone. He does not relate the events of the story as a simple narrative, or in chronological order. His version is an interpretation that prioritises the ideological conflict between the Gods over the actions of the human characters. Nevertheless, up to this point he is telling a story. And, during the interview, listening to the video and following the transcript, up to this point Laura appeared relaxed and appeared to be following. However, the extract I had chosen continued. And from this point on, Laura's attitude changed, and she was no longer relaxed or engaged with what was being said. In the final part of the extract Bill explained the relationship between the story of Antigone and Hegel's concept of dialectical contradiction:

She's stuck, because there's no moral arbiter between different equal Gods. The point that Hegel makes is that this is an in built contradiction in the ideological system of Ancient Greek society. There ain't no way out. There's no resolution. 'What does that lead to?' says Hegel. And what it actually leads to is debates as to which god is top god, as it were. So you get these debates about which god is going to be top god. Conflicts within the system, which will be reflected in – as in Antigone they are – in conflicts between institutions within the system. Because ideas are embodied. But that is a conflict, a contradiction, a dialectic, and it's built into the system: two sides. But what happens out of that conflict, says Hegel, is not that one god emerges as top god, but that a completely new system of religion emerges in which there is only one god, which solves the problem. So instead of saying a top god and a second god, you go to monotheism: Judaeism, Christianity, Islam, where there is only one god who is the ultimate moral arbiter.

(South University, Hegel, lecture)

In this section of the extract there is almost no direct reference to the story of *Antigone*. Instead, Bill is explaining why the story can be read as an example of Hegel's dialectic. As I have suggested, examples are used in different ways in the Political Thought and American Literature classes. My analysis of sections of discussion in the West University class has already shown that in Political Thought examples tended to be hypothetical and used to test out possible and consistent uses of terms, while in the

American Literature classes, in contrast, literary examples were treated as empirical evidence, and detailed analysis of these examples was used to develop new accounts/definitions of concepts. The way the example of *Antigone* is being used here, as might be expected, is consistent with the method of Political Thought. It is being used to illustrate the internal coherence of the Hegelian dialectic. It does not matter whether or not the story is true, nor whether the story can plausibly be interpreted, as Bill suggests, as an explanation of the genesis of monotheism. While Bill's account can be seen as an interpretation of *Antigone*, the individual characters and relationships within the story are not relevant to the point he is trying to make. This way of using an example, while typical of Philosophy or Political Thought, is not transparent to those unfamiliar with these types of disciplinary methodologies.

Laura appears to have no language with which to respond to, or make sense of the discussion of *Antigone*. I asked her to explain what she had understood from this section of the class transcript:

Laura: He was talking about Greek tragedy, and using that as an example, but I forgot what it was now, towards the end.

CL: So the beginning bit, can you say, what was that an example of?

Laura: It was in the Greek tragedy, obviously, there's no outcome to it.

CL: If it was an example of a conflict, what was the conflict between?

Laura: Was it between love and religion? Well most Greek tragedies, there's usually love and relationships.

CL: Do you know the story of Antigone?

Laura: No.

CL: So that was quite difficult. He kind of explained it, but it's quite difficult to take in.

Laura: Yes. Oh God.

(Laura, South University, interview)

Laura's response to the extract, although limited, does provide enough to suggest possible interpretations of her position. The fact that she doesn't mention *Antigone* - she first says that the tutor 'was talking about Greek tragedy', and later confirms that she doesn't know the story - suggests that this cultural reference was for her more exclusionary than explanatory. In fact, the reference to tragedy in general is, perhaps, distracting for Laura, since she positions the genre in relation to a set of ideas, 'love and relationships', that has no direct relation to the Hegelian concepts under discussion. It is

possible to speculate that an exploration of love and relationships in *Antigone* might be the focus of discussion in a school literature class. Love and relationships is not, however, likely to be pertinent to the development of a theory of the state<sup>4</sup>. In relation to this extract, Laura appears to be positioned outside the disciplinary discourse of the classroom at every possible level: she has no language that would enable her to enter the discussion as a discussion of Political Thought.

Laura's response to Marx also reveals an internal contradiction between her own personal and political positions, which in turn produces a conflict between her language and the disciplinary language of the Political Thought classroom. Her main argument against Marx is that she doesn't believe in the idea of a universal class, she believes that people will always put individual interests before class interests. She bases this judgement on her observation of her own country:

With the class structure there never will be one (a universal class) because people are constantly wanting to get ahead of each other. Especially in my country, Trinidad. One of the girls was saying, 'maybe it might work, a proletarian might work in a less developed country'. It wouldn't at all, because in Trinidad people are constantly wanting to move ahead of each other so nobody's going to be there to help each other out at all.

(Laura, South University, interview)

This observation is also consistent with Laura's assessment of her own probable reactions:

The reason I'm at university is that I want to educate myself. I want to do better, I want to get a decent job so I can, yes, buy things for myself. And I think if I had to give that up, I don't think that I could give that up just for – oh it sounds really bad – I don't think I could give it up for a cause, because it's not like it was given to me on a plate, I mean, oh, this is really bad, oh god.

(Laura, South University, interview)

Laura's observation that individual interests appear, empirically, to override class interests constitutes a coherent criticism of Marx's position. However she demonstrates

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<sup>4</sup> This reminds me of the time my General Philosophy tutor suggested that next week we might look at Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*. I admit, I thought it was a bit odd, but I didn't question it, and I was quite pleased that it was something I would actually enjoy reading. Of course, (as my friend Rachel pointed out



considerable discomfort at having to articulate and justify her political instincts, which, she feels, appear selfish. As she explains her views, she frequently says, ‘Oh, it sounds really bad ... Oh, this is really bad’. This perceived contradiction between Laura’s articulation of her political beliefs and her desire not to appear ‘bad’ provides an explanatory context for her reluctance to participate in class.

There are three ways it could be possible to conceptualise Laura’s contradictory position as contributing to her non-participation. Firstly, it might be possible to argue that her contradictory feelings alone might make her unwilling to express her opinions, regardless of the disciplinary and pedagogic framework of the classes. This approach identifies the individual, rather than other structures, as constitutive of the events in the classroom. Secondly, it would be possible to argue that the pedagogic approach of the tutor, as Laura has suggested, does not encourage participation from students whose ideas oppose his own, and that this effect is particularly noticeable in a student such as Laura, who already has contradictory feelings about her position. Thirdly, it is possible to describe the lack of participation as resulting from the position of Laura’s contradictory languages in relation to the disciplinary discourse and methodology of Political Thought. This last approach can also produce a description of the pedagogic approach taken by the tutors as constituted within the disciplinary methodology of the subject. This is significant, because an analysis that attempts to describe the teaching approach in terms of a decontextualised pedagogy undervalues the inherent contradictions between students’ personal languages and the languages of academic disciplines.

The individualising description that identifies Laura’s contradictory languages as the key determinant of her actions cannot stand as the sole, or even the major explanation of her non-participation. Two features of the interview can be used to undermine this description. Firstly, Laura’s repeated identification of her own inadequate use of research and study skills, suggests a desire to participate and take control of her learning that at the very least complicates a description of her as silenced by her own contradictory ideas. She describes interventions she might have made during the class, prefacing a comment, for example, with: ‘I should have asked Bill this’, and saying, ‘in

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when I told her how pleased I was) he was actually referring to J.L. Austin’s book, *Sense and Sensibilia*

the seminars there's so much I want to say', demonstrating an awareness of the possibilities and advantages of participation. Secondly, and more conclusively, she articulates her ideas freely and articulately – although very hesitantly - during the interview. This indicates that the internal contradiction within her position is not enough to inhibit her from developing and expressing her ideas in all contexts.

The argument that the pedagogic approach of the tutor inhibits Laura's participation can, perhaps, be developed more persuasively. However, an examination of the teaching methods reveals how they are always also describable within the terms of the discipline. The pattern of the seminars was for Bill, the tutor, to ask for questions or comments. When comments or questions were offered, he would respond, frequently at some length. He did not, in contrast to all the other tutors I observed, direct questions at the students. His approach was the same when a student raised a point that he disagreed with, he would simply respond, expecting the student to argue their point, rather than first eliciting more about what the student was trying to say. Laura describes her impression of this approach to managing the seminars, which she associates with both of the course tutors:

... Because, Bill's a Marxist, isn't he? Because sometimes their teaching styles, it's really difficult because they always give their views, more than anything. They don't give the other side of the Marxist view. I think it was when Will was arguing a point, and Bill was really defensive, they don't give the other side to it, you know, and sometimes you need that (... ) It's just quite hard sometimes when Bill's got his views and you want to say something against him and you're like, 'I hope he doesn't jump down my throat'.

(Laura, South University, interview)

Laura's interpretation of the tutors' approach is that they are not providing alternative viewpoints and arguments to their own. While there are some clear examples where Bill does argue for positions that are not his own, there are also examples that support Laura's interpretation. These are particularly marked in the session on Marx that took place immediately before my interview with Laura. In this session it is possible to read some of Bill's responses as 'defensive' of his traditionalist Marxist position. I want to explore one example of this, which I discussed in my interview with two other students

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(which I didn't particularly enjoy).

in the class. In this example, Bill objects to a student's suggestion that Marxism is a 'belief'. The intervention occurs as he has been explaining what it means to suggest that communism is the end of history:

13. Bill: ( ... ) We will move into a history that we will shape ourselves (...) it's not the end of history, but it's a qualitatively different sort of history. We will look back, or I won't, I'll probably be too old, I'll probably be dead by the time communist society has come into existence...
14. (intervention from Will, can't hear)
15. Tamsin: So you believe it's going to happen do you?
16. Bill: I don't believe, I analyse it as so. It's not a religion.
17. Tamsin: Do you foresee it?
18. Bill: You can't foresee it. There is the alternative, as Rosa Luxembourg put it: socialism or barbarism. And as we look around the post war world we know that it's tending more in the direction of barbarism at the moment... (...).  
(South University, Marx and Engels)

Bill's rejection of Tamsin's initial question, and then again of her reformulation of her question can certainly be interpreted as 'defensive', and also as off-putting for an unconfident student. However, it is also a valid correction that suggests a more precise way of understanding Marx's thought that is consistent with the discipline of Political Thought more generally, both in methodology (the distinction itself constitutes an example of the type of linguistic analysis dominant within the discipline), and in content, (the assertion of the importance of reasoned analysis, rather than religious belief as the basis for a political position). My discussion of this extract in my interviews with Nadia and Guy, two other students in the class, re-iterated this dual interpretation. They both suggested that they would have made the same 'incorrect' use of 'believe', and to this extent they appeared to interpret Bill's interventions as authoritative and, potentially, intimidating. They also both interpreted the exchange as a clash between two languages: they suggested that Tamsin was asking a personal question about Bill's opinions, whereas his response uses a more precise, academic language. However, neither found this problematic, and both suggested that the exchange was useful and interesting. Bill's own strongly and very openly held personal political convictions, as Laura suggested, might also help to explain his vehemence on this issue.

Bill's interventions, then, should be read as a product of the disciplinary language of Political Thought and of his own political and disciplinary positions. As such, Laura's discomfort cannot be understood merely as a response to a style of teaching, but as a response to a style of teaching Political Thought: the interventions of the teacher are always simultaneously both examples of teaching methods and examples of the discipline. Furthermore, Bill's general approach of arguing against students' points, rather than eliciting and supporting them can also be identified with the discipline of Political Thought. This style is not dissimilar to the mode of discussion in the West University Political Thought group that I observed, which was regarded by the tutor and by the course lecturer as an especially good class. While asserting and debating positions are generic feature of academic discourse, they are particularly and distinctively central to Political Thought, which prioritises the development of definitions of concepts over interpretation of texts or other data. Indeed, Bill confirmed this in his interview, commenting, 'I'm trying to make them learn ideas. The texts are a good way of learning ideas ... but I'm primarily interested in people understanding the ideas'. And, he continued, a too textual approach could restrict students' independent understanding and application of ideas: '... there can be a danger of going down the text road. If you go too far down the text road people just largely repeat, rather than grasping ideas as things you can use and apply'. This conceptualisation of the discipline clearly prioritises students' expression of their own ideas and opinions and denigrates the use of texts as a means of mediation between the views of the speaker and the knowledge claims of the discipline.

To exemplify this distinction between disciplines, I want finally to discuss Laura's account of a topic in her law course that she had found particularly interesting. She explained a series of legal cases following the Hillsborough football stadium disaster, which she had studied in a Law class. Several people who had not actually been in the stadium, but who had been watching on television at home, had attempted to sue for compensation. Laura appeared to be interested both by the fact that the case related to Hillsborough and also, especially, by the bizarre nature of the claims:

In legal issues we did the Hillsborough disaster case, (...) and we had to write case notes on it, and it was just interesting researching into it and finding out different views and how people were suing. I mean, the really fascinating thing was people who weren't actually there, who

watched it on TV, were actually suing. And we have certain things that you can sue by, you know, foreseeable reasons. It was just really interesting seeing that people think that they can get money out of the chief constable like that.

(Laura, South University, interview)

This example can be contrasted with Laura's experience of the Political Thought class in several ways. Firstly, it corresponds to Laura's stated reasons for choosing to study Politics and Law: she said that she wanted to find out about the news, and about what was going on in the world, and this example from a contemporary news event very precisely meets this requirement. Secondly, the structure of the example can be contrasted with the use of *Antigone* in the Political Thought class. As in the *Antigone* example, the cases brought in relation to the Hillsborough disaster are used to illustrate theoretical points: Laura talks about 'foreseeable reasons', for example. However, in the Hillsborough example the actual case is an essential empirical example, not merely a hypothetical illustration. Although the actual relationships and individual motivations of the litigants may or may not be central to the point of law being taught, they are however more central than was the case in Political Thought, and it is the details of the individuals, 'that people think they can get money out of the chief constable like that', that Laura finds interesting. In contrast, her attempts to impose an interpretation in terms of love and relationships onto the reference to Greek tragedy in the Political Thought class were simply misleading for her. Finally, in discussing the motivations and moral dilemmas of the litigants in the Hillsborough case, Laura is not required to explicitly question or justify her own views, as she was in the Political Thought class. The example cases used in Law provide a buffer against the expression of your own views which is not available in the Political Thought classes.

This disciplinary distinction can be related to my definition of gendered subject positions: the masculine position as one where the subject creates and speaks their own language and the feminine position as one defined by languages that are imposed on the subject. Of course, this is an oversimplification, and it is certainly not the case that any discipline that uses external sources as the basis of knowledge claims can be defined as 'feminine'. Nevertheless, it is the case that different disciplinary methodologies require different kinds of relationships between the speaking subject and the claims they wish to make.

It appears that the contradictions between Laura's personal and political positions make her uncomfortable and unwilling to articulate her political opinions in the classroom. The nature of Political Thought, in which the articulation of your own ideas through narrow, metonymic chains of reasoning is the primary method of engaging with the subject, and which, therefore, does not prioritise the description and analysis of empirical evidence, exacerbates Laura's discomfort. The disciplinary style enacted in the tutor's precise articulation of his own academic/political position, further alienates Laura. Thus his articulation of disciplinary language can be read, at the level of teaching methods, as judgemental and exclusive. Laura's response to this, against her own better judgement, is to withdraw her participation from the class and to stop asking questions.

I have suggested that these features of the South University Political Thought classes can be read as gendered, and that Laura's position is consistent with the feminised position of a subject unable to develop a coherent identity through the production of a language that codifies their personal interests and experiences within the legitimate discourses of their social context.

#### **4.5. Conclusions**

Boundaries of legitimacy within these classes are produced where there is a conflict between the political position of the student and the methodology of the discipline. Both Michael and Edward are able to speak in the classes, but experience frustration in their attempts to develop their ideas. In both cases, it is not simply that the tutor and other students disagree with these marginalized political positions. Rather, Michael and Edward's political positions can be associated with methodologies that conflict with the dominant methodology of their respective disciplines. In addition, in each of these cases, disciplinary methodologies and identifications produce teaching styles that are in contradiction with the avowed inclusive pedagogic aims of the courses, and which inherently and inevitably prioritise certain languages over others. In West University Political Thought metonymic reasoning processes were prioritised over Michael's more externalist, metaphorical approach. In East University American Literature the reverse

was true, and metaphorical interpretations were prioritised over Edward's attempt to construct more literal, metonymic readings. In both Political Thought classes, the expression of individual opinion, conceptual disagreements and hypothetical examples were prioritised over the mediated presentation of texts and data. Thus, classroom interactions are regulated and restricted by legitimated disciplinary codes, which necessarily position other modes of reasoning as illegitimate, unthinkable and uncodifiable.

I have suggested that these classroom interactions also represent moves within gendered hierarchies, which align the unthinkable, or the uncoded, with the feminine. Within this gendered hierarchy, it appears it is possible for male students to resist the feminised position by asserting their superiority over (female) tutors. Edward and Michael are both dismissive of their female tutors' views and both identify strongly with authoritative academics and critics in opposition to their teachers. Laura, in contrast, despite disagreeing with Bill, respects his superior knowledge, conceding 'I suppose that's Political Thought', to modify her criticisms of his pedagogy in deference to his position as an academic. Where Edward and Michael identify with academic authorities, Laura identifies with a language of academic skills within which she can describe her own failings<sup>5</sup>. And where Edward and Michael, to differing extents, articulate their opposition to the curriculum they are being offered, Laura, within the classes, is silent.

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<sup>5</sup> Work within various fields has argued that contemporary skills discourses are reductive, atomising, and fail to help students to understand the cultural practices and epistemological assumptions that would allow them to become 'insiders' in relation to academic knowledge (see, for example, Hyland, 2000, pp. 144 – 150. See also, Lillis, 2001, Lea and Street, 2000).

# **INCLUDED POSITIONS IN POLITICAL THOUGHT: TEMPORALLY DOMINANT KNOWLEDGE, GENDER AND THE POSITIONING OF THE NEW UNIVERSITY STUDENT**

## **5.1. Introduction**

This thesis describes an array of positions available to students in undergraduate classes in Political Thought and American Literature. The previous chapter described student positions that might be described as marginalized, excluded or resistant. So far I have attempted to define these terms in relation to disciplinary methodologies and gendered hierarchies in the observed classes. Before I begin I want to clarify, very briefly, the definition of marginalized, or 'excluded' positions at a conceptual level, in relation to the alternative descriptions of student positions as coherent, dominant, included or conformist.

The concept of overdetermination foregrounds the radically incomplete nature of social and subjective identities. Thus discursive fields, such as institutions, disciplines and genders, are not autonomous, but rather gain stability, or dominance within a specific context only in so far as each of the discursive fields that constitute the social overlaps with, or re-iterates aspects of others. Where, instead, there is a contradiction between two discursive fields, an antagonistic relationship exists in which each field sets a limit on the possible articulation of the other. This antagonism has been described as 'the "experience" of the limit of the social' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985, p. 125). This experience of antagonism is paradoxical in that it both re-iterates the fragility of the subordinate field, and at the same time reveals the possibility of subverting the stability of the dominant. Laclau and Mouffe suggest:

We must consider this 'experience' of the limit of the social from two different points of view. On the one hand, as an experience of failure. If the subject is constructed through language, as a



partial and metaphorical incorporation into a symbolic order, any putting into question of that order must necessarily constitute an identity crisis. But on the other hand, this experience of failure is not an access to a diverse ontological order, to a something beyond differences, simply because ... there is no beyond. The limit of the social cannot be traced as a frontier separating two territories – for the perception of a frontier supposes the perception of something beyond it that would have to be objective and positive – that is, a new difference. The limit of the social must be given within the social itself as something subverting it, destroying its ambition to constitute a full presence. Society never manages fully to be society, because everything is penetrated by its limits. (ibid. p. 126 – 7)

Speaking at a purely theoretical level, Laclau and Mouffe suggest that antagonism constitutes an ‘identity crisis’ for the symbolic order as a whole. As such, we could interpret the case studies of marginal students presented in the previous chapter as putting into question the assumptions of objectivity and inclusiveness that are implicit in the curricula and teaching methods of the universities. However, as we have seen, the sense of failure, or identity crisis, is more directly embodied in the person of individual students than in the system or institution. This observation can be directly connected to Laclau and Mouffe’s second point, that ‘the limit of the social must be given within the social itself’. The existence of discursive contradictions does not suggest an alternative, exterior position where such conflicts can be resolved, but rather reveals the limits of what can be encoded within the existing symbolic order. Such contradictions, then, must always be present within the social, to signify its limit, and therefore do not necessarily signify the imminent subversion of the field.

All sets of positions, then, the contradictory and the coherent, the marginalized and the dominant, the excluded and the included, are defined by and conform to the same symbolic system. The difference between these positions is precisely, and only, one of position, defined in relation to the relatively stable discursive fields within the symbolic system as a whole. Defined in this way, inclusion cannot be seen as necessarily positive or desirable. Rather, included positions conform to and re-iterate oppressive codes. Excluded positions, too, are produced through the repetition of institutionalised codes. Laura and Michael thus represent the limits of Political Thought within the discursive field of the Political Thought class itself. Edward similarly represents one of the boundaries of American Literature.

In this chapter I am going to describe how repressive codes of gender and class are reiterated in the 'dominant', or 'included' positions available in undergraduate Political Thought as enacted in the two classes that I observed. To do this, I am going to outline an array of student positions that are consistent with the disciplinary methodology of their field. I will foreground several features of these positions. The first feature of these included positions is a conceptualisation of Political Thought as applied knowledge in the service of government. The second feature I will describe is the way the production of an included position involves the construction of a narrative that is able to disguise contradictions between the criteria regulating successful academic performance within the classroom and uncoded, subordinate or feminising positions. I will also argue that the specific instantiation of these contradictions is defined by the ethos and expectations of the institution: while the culture of the elite West University classroom prioritises students' academic performance and self expression, the culture of the South University classroom prioritises a more deferential positioning of students in relation to their tutor and to the academic texts they are studying. In the final section of this chapter I will argue that the position and teaching approach of the class tutor can also be understood as produced through these same discursive contexts of discipline and gender within higher education institutions.

## **5.2. Included positions: Political Thought as applied knowledge.**

The marginalized positions produced in the Political Thought classes that I discussed in the previous chapter were defined, in part, by the different possible ways of approaching the central concepts of the discipline: either by analysing the meaning of concepts as internally consistent objects via core definitions or by looking externally to develop an understanding of these concepts as social constructs. Included positions, then, are partly defined by an acceptance of the significance of core definitions of the concepts within Political Thought. The distinction between these two approaches is illustrated again in the following brief extract from the West University class where the students are discussing the notion of 'ideals':

- 178. Lisa: ... Freedom and equality, it's so, it's not real. I don't think it applies to life. Freedom and equality they're just ideals, where shall we go? It can never happen.
- 179. Mark: In order to have government you have to have ideals, to direct your will.

180. Michael: That's one way of looking at it.
181. Mark: What would yours be?
182. Michael: The other way of looking at it is that when you're in government you do what's best for your interest.
183. Mark: Right.
184. Michael: You tell everyone you're following ideals.
- (West University, Rousseau 2)

The distinction, to re-iterate, is between the desire to define ideals such as 'freedom' and 'equality' as precisely as possible in order to guide action (Mark's position, 179) and the desire to reveal the way such supposed ideals are constructs manipulated by those in power (Michael's position, 182, 184). The student positions I am describing in this section are characterised by an interest in the first of these, which also corresponds to Bourdieu's description of temporal knowledge: knowledge in the service of the existing social order. The students tend to emphasise the applied nature of the discipline, over a conceptualisation of the discipline as the construction of a coherent, rational conceptual framework that can provide a tool in the search for truth. While the 'truth' of concepts is still seen as important, the role of Political Thought in developing an understanding of 'truth' is seen by the students as limited, both as an aim, and also in practice, since Political Thought is limited by its restriction to theoretical rather than empirical arguments.

This general conceptualisation of Political Thought as applied knowledge is articulated in various ways by the students. Mark's articulation of this position is, perhaps, closest to that of the tutors, in that he identifies the importance of developing a consistent conceptual framework, which he describes as 'getting your ideas straight':

...ultimately I would say that political theory is about getting your ideas straight. Because, essentially, for people like me, who want to do social sciences and perhaps politics later on, it's important to have a strong basis for your actions. Not only to convince others, but to convince yourself that you're doing the right thing. (Mark, West University, interview)

Mark emphasises the need to be clear about your conceptual framework, but prioritises the function of this as a basis for action, rather than its function as a way of understanding 'the truth'. Charlotte was more explicit about the limitations of abstract conceptual frameworks:

I would never say that it's as clear cut as Mill's liberty principle makes it sound. And even when he says that actions which harm, unless they harm someone else, they're private choices, because actions can't be isolated like that, they start off a chain of events. And at some point you have to say, 'well, you started this. This is your fault'. And I'm not sure where you draw the line, really.'  
(Charlotte, West University, interview)

She suggests that Mill's liberty principle cannot not determine political policy because it is too abstract, and requires re-interpretation in relation to each specific case: so, for example, the question of whether smoking is self regarding or other regarding is not answered by Mill, but must be argued out by policy makers. Later in the interview, she takes this point further, suggesting that these issues cannot be argued out at a purely conceptual level, but require empirical data to inform decisions:

Like Mill, in *On Liberty*, addressed social opinion and social tyranny being a bar to what you can do in life, but then he didn't really address poverty and education and health care ... as being a hindrance or a help to you obtaining freedom of choice and what you can do with your life. So that's definitely something that goes beyond political theory in the philosophical way and takes you into political science...Because it takes you into a question of which type of welfare systems and which type of state and government work best...  
(Charlotte, West University, interview)

She appears to suggest that you would need empirical evidence about the effects of particular political and welfare systems in order to evaluate the relationship between, for example, health, education, freedom and government. Thus she has a clear conception both of the function she requires Political Thought to perform, similar to that described by Mark, and of the methodological limitations that construct the boundary of the field.

Nadia, from the South University Political Thought class, articulated a similar concern with the relationship between Political Thought and the workings of government. Most of the interview focussed on the previous week's session on Marx, and Nadia's doubts

about Marxism were expressed as a scepticism that it would provide practical political solutions to the problems that it diagnoses within capitalism:

... Of course sweatshops are immoral, and I don't think anyone disagreed with that. But I think the point they were trying to make was that ... you can get rid of it without going to communism. Maybe there's another way of getting rid of it.

(Nadia, South University, interview)

There is a similar prioritisation of practical issues of government in her analysis of the concept of a universal class and the abolition of the state:

I don't understand that theory about having no state, and how he envisages that to be, how you can't have a state and how it would run ... how will we go from this stage to not wanting competition and being able to do everything equally. Because in a way, I would believe you'd need to stop crime and things for it to run.

(Nadia, South University, interview)

Both of these comments raise questions about the possibility and nature of state intervention to govern society, to provide the rule of law and to protect individuals from exploitation. In both cases Nadia moves from abstract descriptions, 'sweat shops are immoral', 'that theory about having no state', to concrete questions: how can we get rid of sweatshops; what would society look like without a state. Again, there is an expectation that Political Thought should, on some level, provide answers to this type of applied political question. The abstract is only useful in so far as it can be applied to real political questions. This position, already articulated above by Mark and Charlotte, was reiterated by Mark when he was asked to define the discipline of Political Thought:

...it's not about reaching the truth or knowledge or religion ... it's more practical. It's about what we should do to reach the good society. And therefore the good life, but through society.

(Mark, West University, interview)

All of these three students, furthermore, had been, or planned to be, involved in mainstream politics in some way. Both of the female students had worked for MPs in their years off and Mark hoped to work in international relations. All three had also been involved in political campaigns of various sorts. These questions of how to

develop and justify political policy were therefore, for these students, not merely idle academic speculation.

What I am going to suggest is that this explicit sense of occupying a position within the political system, combined with a conceptualisation of Political Thought as an internally coherent way of developing concepts that can contribute directly to political decision-making, is necessary to the construction of a consistent and comfortable position from which to speak as a student within the discipline. These three students, and other students I will refer to in this section, share these characteristics, and because of this are positioned as 'included' within the Political Thought classes.

### **5.3. The gendering of 'included' positions in Political Thought classrooms**

Mark was among the most active participants in the West University group. Charlotte was one of the least frequent speakers. At South University, Nadia did not speak at all during my observations of her class. Of the regular attenders in Mark, Charlotte and Michael's class at West University there was one female student, Rachel, who spoke relatively frequently and one male student who spoke relatively infrequently. In Nadia and Laura's class at South University, the most vocal participants were male students, but two female students contributed occasionally and several male students did not speak.

I am going to construct an account of the gendered nature of 'included' positions within the Political Thought classes. This account is based on the fact that ethos and expectations within higher education attribute different values to different modes of classroom participation. Within the West University Politics department, active participation in classroom discussions, and students' expression of their own opinions are not only informally recognised markers of success, they are also formally codified in the requirements of the course: the West University class tutors fill in reports on their students which include a comment on classroom participation. This valued mode of participation can be described as gendered for several reasons. Merely by dint of its

codification, informal or formal, as a marker of success, active participation can be described as consistent with a masculine position, since the feminine position is, by definition, excluded from codification. From a similar theoretical perspective, legitimate participation and self expression can be described as gendered because it is consistent with the definition of the masculine position as subject of language, in control of what can be spoken and what can be codified. Speaking and expressing an opinion can thus be seen as, by definition, constituting a masculine position. At an empirical level, as I have indicated, these modes of participation are gendered because male students speak more frequently and at greater length than female students.

However, neither Nadia nor Charlotte made any explicit reference to issues of gender in discussing their mode of participation in class. Both suggested that not participating in class discussions was not equivalent to not participating in the class, and both provided coherent explanations of how their chosen mode of participation either helped or did not impede their learning:

... Through the whole lecture or seminar thoughts are going through my head, 'maybe I should ask that'. I don't have that tendency to ask, though. And a lot of the time the questions are answered, maybe not directly through the way I want to ask the question, but in the end I do feel 'oh yes, now I understand what that is, or what it isn't'.

(Nadia, South University Political Thought, interview)

I think generally the way I approach classes is just to sort of sit there and work out what I thought and to sort of get things clear in my own head. So I tend to sit there with my pad of paper and jot down things that were said and then have all these little arrows and things coming out of it with what I thought. And that was quite good for me in getting it in my own head. Because when I left I had this page of notes and I was like, yes, I can go back to that. Whereas I think I knew that if I wanted to say something I wouldn't have a problem with it. And I think a lot of other people approached it in that they didn't really take notes, they wanted much more to discuss it out loud with other people. So, I think, because of the way I learn in classes anyway, I was never going to talk much anyway.

(Charlotte, West University Political Thought, interview)

From Nadia's account, her mode of participation appears less strategic than Charlotte's: she justifies her silence by suggesting that her questions tend to be answered at some point in the discussion. Charlotte, in contrast, has an explicit account that suggests that

joining in the discussions more might actually interfere with her learning style. At other points in the interviews, other factors influencing participation in discussions emerged. Nadia, again, was less precise than Charlotte, but her account explicitly suggests that her lack of participation is a function of something more ‘personal’ than either simply an effective learning strategy or simply a lack of confidence:

I’m probably not a person to say a lot. I don’t say more in other classes and I think it’s a bit about my confidence, my personal confidence about saying something in class, and whether it’s relevant, or, I suppose it probably is because it will show whether I understand something, but it’s more of a personal thing.

(Nadia, South University Political Thought, interview)

While Nadia concedes to one plausible explanation, ‘it probably is because it will show whether I understand something’, she is clearly not quite satisfied with this. Her final, ‘it’s more of a personal thing’, is left un-clarified.

Charlotte again provides a fuller account, and complex gendered positions can be read into the strategies that she describes:

Well, on some issues (it seems important to discuss my ideas). In some classes when there was one big issue that we spoke about. But when we were moving quickly on from lots of different things, it was really ‘well, if you say something then we’ll get stuck on that, and really, that’s out of the way for me, I don’t want to talk about that’. Or maybe half way through the class I would come back to an issue that we’d dealt with right at the beginning. And the way I thought about it was maybe a lot more haphazard than maybe a lot of other people in the class, who would just think instantly when somebody said something. So rather than jot it down and get it straight in their head, they were able to respond much quicker orally, whereas I sort of jot it down, think about it, see how that bit related to another bit, and then I’d get it clear in my head. So I’m not sure that saying something would have been that useful for me, because I would have said it and then gone, ‘oh, actually no, I’ve just realised’. So I think it helped me a lot more to get it straight in my head.

(Charlotte, West University Political Thought, interview)

At times Charlotte’s account of her strategies appears to be very much directed at her own learning, identifying points where ‘that’s out of the way *for me*, I don’t want to talk about that’. However, at other points, her strategies are based on a sense of an overall



order to the class discussion that she doesn't want to disrupt, thus putting the group before her own interest in making a particular point. She says:

Or maybe half way through the class I would come back to an issue that we'd dealt with right at the beginning. And the way I thought about it was maybe a lot more haphazard than maybe a lot of other people in the class, who would just think instantly when somebody said something.

(Charlotte, West University Political Thought, interview)

Here she appears to take responsibility for not disrupting the discussion by coming back to an issue they have already discussed. So, arguably, Charlotte is demonstrating more sense of responsibility for the session as a social and educational event than some of her classmates.

While this kind of sense of responsibility for seminars as a social event is clearly not confined to female students, it is gendered both empirically and also conceptually. Other studies of gender and schooling have identified similar prioritisation of social over academic responsibilities in female students both in classroom interactions (Kelly, 1985) and in accounts given by girls of their 'ideal self' (Walkerdine, 1998, pp. 105 – 109). The role of managing, or mediating, social relations within the class was adopted by female participants in my study on several occasions and was also foregrounded in the accounts they gave in their interviews. This apparently selfless attention to the interests of others has a strong association with conceptions of femininity, which is why it is important for women to demonstrate these characteristics, while the same characteristics can be read as a sign of weakness in men. Such attention to the needs of the group over the self can also be defined in terms of gender because it is not recognised as a criterion for academic success: it is uncodified within the practice of higher education classrooms. Thus this apparent repression, or, more precisely, the denial of self-interest is analogous to Lacan's description of female patients' refusal, or inability, to talk of *jouissance*. I would wish to reject absolutely an interpretation that suggests that women are more co-operative or less self-interested than men. My argument is that women have a huge interest in maintaining the performance of such selflessness. Charlotte's account can thus be read as a complex compilation of her self-interested strategies as a learner and her unwillingness to transgress gender codes and be seen to impose her interests on the rest of the class. Her presentation of herself within

the interview as both conscious of the needs of others and as 'more haphazard than maybe other people' may be interpreted as part of a gendered performance, foregrounding the feminised features of caring and also of disorganised thinking. This is very similar to Rachel's narration of her classroom participation discussed in chapter two. However, Charlotte's position is the inverse of Rachel's. While Rachel had to counterbalance a successful but 'masculine' performance in class by foregrounding her femininity in the interview, Charlotte, in contrast, uses the interview to rationalise her failure to conform to the criteria for successful academic performance in the classroom. Her elaborate rationalisation of her learning strategies can thus be interpreted as an attempt to re-inscribe herself within a framework of academic success: she might be interpreted, here, as attempting to codify her own performance so that it might be recognised as a valid alternative to the more vocal performances of her (mostly) male peers.

An analysis of the contributions Charlotte actually made in class will clarify both the overdetermining<sup>1</sup> nature of her rationalising account of her participation and also the feminised nature of her contributions.

To clarify this way of understanding classroom interaction, I want to examine Charlotte's claim that she would have no problem speaking in class, if and when she wanted to. In fact, each of her interventions in the classes I observed was facilitated by the tutor, either soliciting Charlotte's opinion when she hadn't yet contributed, or, in one case, intervening to interrupt another student who had not noticed that Charlotte was trying to speak (Rousseau 1, p. 19). This seems to me to suggest that Charlotte's qualification of her claim that she would have no problem speaking in class is very appropriate:

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<sup>1</sup> This use of the term overdetermination is derived from the Freudian or psychoanalytic concept. According to Freud, all symptoms - neurotic symptoms or elements of a dream, for example - can be traced to a variety of repressed and rationalising sources. See, for example, Freud, 1900. He suggests, 'A satisfaction which is exhibited in a dream and can, of course, be immediately referred to its proper place in the dream-thoughts is not always completely elucidated by this reference alone. It is as a rule necessary to look for *another* source of it in the dream-thoughts, a source which is under the pressure of censorship. As a result of that pressure, this source would normally have produced, not satisfaction, but the contrary effect. Owing to the presence of the first source of affect, however, the second source is enabled to withdraw its affect of satisfaction from repression and allow it to act as an intensification of the

... I think I knew that if I wanted to say something I wouldn't have a problem with it.

'I think', at the beginning of this, changes the modality of the claim, and as such undermines the explanatory force of Charlotte's rationalisation of her silence in the classes, revealing it as an over-determining, rather than a necessary and sufficient factor. What is suggested, then, is that it is valid to explore other possible explanations of Charlotte's limited participation in class discussions. This space for exploration, I am suggesting, is the same space identified in Nadia's earlier unclarified reference to something 'personal', to account for her lack of inclination to speak in class. And both may be understood in terms of students' need to maintain their gendered positions.

The substantive form and content of Charlotte's interventions can also be interpreted as feminised. The following intervention was striking because it was the only time in the observed sessions at West University that a student participant attempted to summarise the different points raised in the discussion in this way. In general, as I have suggested elsewhere, the discussions progressed by different participants making claims that expressed their opinion, but which were rarely developed or backed up by sustained argument. In the cases where individuals did develop sustained arguments, these would usually only relate to their own position, rather than trying to incorporate the position of another student. In the following extract, then, Charlotte's reference to points made in the preceding discussion was untypical of the West University class discussion. One effect of this is that Charlotte avoids stating a clear independent view, even when asked directly for her opinion:

266. Alison (tutor): Charlotte, you haven't made a comment.

267. Charlotte: I think what you said earlier about different forms of freedom, everyone seems to be talking about absolute freedom. A lot of the philosophers seem to be talking about accepting that you have qualified freedom, so that you can live and decide and that was a more fulfilling freedom. But then you (to Michael) were saying earlier about how freedom: why is it? Or, explain why some people are freer than others. And then you were talking about slaves, so surely you must accept that you're freer than them. So you have a greater degree of freedom than slaves that still exist now. So there are differences in freedom.

(West University, Rousseau 2)

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satisfaction from the first source. Thus it appears that affects in dreams are fed from a confluence of

This intervention validates Charlotte's description, quoted above, of her engagement in the class, illustrating the outcome of her jotting down points and making relationships between them. It also, as I have suggested, disguises her own position in references to what other people have said, both during the class ('you were saying earlier') and in her reading ('a lot of the philosophers seem to be talking about'), on the subject of freedom. By the time she gets to the statement of her own opinion, 'there are differences in freedom', she has already argued her case. This is, as I have suggested, the opposite to the norm in this class, where opinions are usually stated and then only later, on occasion, backed up by argument.

A comparison with interventions from another student may clarify the point I am trying to make. The following extract is taken from the discussion of Hobbes' conception of morality. Tom intervenes:

- 117. Tom: I think it's a problem using the word 'morality', because we've got all sorts of connotations...
- 118. Michael: That's what I'm saying, basically people have to...
- 119. Tom: You have to take that, it's a word...
- 120. Alison (tutor): Well this is what I'm trying to get at..
- 121. Tom: It's a word that we use in different ways, but Hobbes doesn't use it in that way.
- 122. Alison: Well, be careful, how are we using it? and how is Hobbes using it? and is that open to interpretation?

(West University, Hobbes and Social Contract Theory)

As Alison's final questions suggest, Tom is making a claim about the ways the term 'morality' is used without explaining or defining the different uses that he is referring to. Further than this, although he does not explain his terms, he appears to identify strongly with the 'we' to whom he is attributing this unspecified usage. This contrasts with Charlotte's exposition of first the general class discussion, then the philosopher's views, Michael's earlier point, and the example of slavery, in the construction of her own opinion. She takes nothing for granted while Tom takes everything for granted.

It might be possible to interpret the difference between Charlotte and Tom's interventions purely in relation to stylistic or academic criteria. The structure of Charlotte's more developed argument might be read simply as a signifier of academic ability or inclination. However, as I have suggested, I think this would exclude relevant levels of social relations that can provide a richer account of what is going on here. My interpretation is based on an understanding of language as a product of power relations within which the assumption of shared meanings and a shared language is a luxury of the dominant, masculine, position. Tom's confident assumptions about the language he is using can be related to the fact that he conforms absolutely to the second feature of 'included' student positions: he identifies strongly and optimistically with contemporary UK politics, seeing it as constitutive of a free and democratic system:

'I think you can get involved and you can change things.' (Hobbes and Social Contract, # 268)

'I consider myself free, in that I can think what I like and I can say pretty much what I like.'  
(Rousseau 1, p. 13)

'When elections are called, politicians do try to appeal to people, as what they think they want. I still think the majority of people in the country will agree with ninety percent of what the government does.' (Hobbes and Social Contract, # 359)

This last claim in particular does earn Tom some ridicule from the other students, but nevertheless, such a stable sense of his position within the dominant system ensures his inclusion. This is not just because he has an investment in the conceptual products of the discipline, as do the other included students described here, but also because his strong identification with the dominant political discourse enables him to assume the coherence of his linguistic position. In his interview Tom explained his enjoyment of the class:

It's good fun. The debate is really high level, which is really interesting (...) And you can test out your ideas against someone else, someone who will argue back.

(Tom, West University, interview)

This confident assurance that he knows the rules of the game, analogous to the position of the subject of the dominant language, can be described as a gendered, as well as a political, identification.

Ned's contribution in the session on Rousseau provides another example of a student occupying this typical, masculine position within the West University Political Thought classes. Ned is emphatically un-persuaded by Rousseau's conception of a society where man can be free:

Ned: Well, his aim is to find a society where you can have freedom, and he's not going to do it.

Alison: Why not?

Ned: Because as soon as man's taken out of the state of nature, whatever happens, there's always going to be a certain degree of loss of freedom. He says you gain moral freedom and that can be swapped for the freedom in the state of nature. But it can't. It doesn't really make any sense.

Alison: Why can't you?

Ned: Because it just. Well, because you have to define what freedom is to you, I guess, first of all. But I took freedom in the state of nature to be the ultimate freedom you can have, in terms of basically you can do whatever you want, with no restraints. Not necessarily the best freedom you can have, but the ultimate freedom. And as soon as you put any restraints on how you can act, even though you say, you know, we're within the general will, you're acting in the wrong way, kind of thing. You're acting in a way which doesn't retain your freedom, there's still a constraint.

(West University, Rousseau, p. 10)

Just as Tom argued from a position of certainty about his conception of morality, Ned here argues from a position of certainty about his conception of freedom, that 'as soon as man's taken out of the state of nature ... there's always going to be a certain degree of loss of freedom'. As in the example of Tom's use of the term 'morality', Ned does not initially offer any definition of what he means by the term he is deploying. When he does offer a more developed definition, in response to Alison's questioning, he constructs a relatively coherent justification of his original position, which does not, however, explore the more complex implications of the distinction between society and the state of nature. The definition of freedom that he constructs – 'basically you can do whatever you want' – enables him to sustain his emphatically articulated position in opposition to Rousseau. The culture of the West University Political Thought class legitimates and values this ability to construct and defend a position. This cultural demand was re-articulated by Alison, the Political Thought tutor, in her interview: 'you've got to look at where you stand in addition to looking at purely textual problems'. The position she is advocating, from which the student appears to produce

and control their own language, as I have suggested, is consistent with a description of the masculine position in relation to language.

The feminised position within the West University classroom is characterised by the prioritisation of gender performance, conformity with codes of femininity, over academic or disciplinary performance, and exhibits this prioritisation in the subsidiary position attributed to its own language, which therefore requires additional evidence, argument and authorities to support its claims. The interventions I have just discussed therefore exemplify contrasting gender positions in relation to the class discussion, and these positions are differentiated by their mode of legitimation in relation to the disciplinary discourse. The conceptual use of describing these positions as gendered, 'masculine' or 'feminised', is that it provides some explanation of another level of performance, or positioning, in relation to classroom interaction. Although it might look like a position of 'weakness', female students have something to gain from the occupation of the 'feminised' position. The more 'masculine' mode of interaction entails a risk for female students in terms of their perceived 'femininity'. Male students, on the other hand, risk more in their silence. The relevance and usefulness of an intervention to the seminar as a social event is therefore a high priority in the feminised position, while in the masculine position, the importance of an intervention as a personal performance is prioritised. This was stated in fairly explicit terms by Harrison, a male student from the US, in his third year at an Ivy League university, and currently spending a term at West University and taking the Political Thought module:

In all honesty ... if I need to speak in order to make myself look good, I'll speak about something that is kind of on the exterior, do you know what I'm saying? Because I don't know exactly what Rousseau said, so I'll kind of put in something that kind of relates.

(Harrison, West University Political Thought, interview)

Harrison interprets the seminar as an arena in which he needs to perform, 'to make myself look good.' And, as I have already suggested, for him this requirement to perform is prioritised over the need to ensure that contributions are relevant or useful to others in the group. This prioritisation is also consistent with criteria of academic success within higher education in general, and in his department in particular. For

Harrison, it appears, this requirement to perform is not problematic, but for a less confident male student, or for a male student who is less familiar with the codes of the academic context, the requirement to perform might become more difficult and uncomfortable. Charlotte, in contrast, might find the performance difficult, but she does not prioritise this demand to perform, and so is able to rationalise her lack of participation in class discussions in such a way as to construct a (relatively) coherent position for herself.

#### **5.4. Institutional differences in student positions**

Charlotte, Tom and Harrison are all students at West University. The West University Politics department has an international reputation and a highly selective intake. In the group I observed, all of the students had either been privately educated, or had at least one parent educated to post graduate level, or, for several, both of these descriptions applied. South University, in contrast, has an explicit 'access mission': in the group I observed at South University, none of the students for whom information is available had been privately educated and one student had one parent educated to post graduate level. The mode of interaction in the classes at South University was not the same as that at West University. In the South University classroom students rarely, if ever, stated opinions in the way that was the norm in the West University classroom. This difference can be described in many ways. The description of the South University classes that I want to foreground here is one that describes the classroom interaction that I observed in terms of the gendered positions that I have identified in discussion of the West University data. The factors that I will describe as determining, in relation to the observed differences in classroom interaction, are institutional differences in mission, curricula and student body: which are effectively functions of class relations. These factors, I will suggest, are also intertwined with the different teaching styles of the tutors: the explicitly student centred approach of the West University seminar leader in contrast with the more didactic approach of the South University lecturer.

In effect, what I am going to suggest is that the array of 'included' positions produced within structures of class and gender, within the field of undergraduate Political Thought, offer the most coherent and stable subject positions to male students from



educationally advantaged backgrounds. The positioning of socially and educationally advantaged male students in a dominant position in Political Thought classes can be directly associated to the other characteristic of 'included' students as those able to identify with decision-making positions within the Political system. Such positions of power are traditionally and consistently occupied by those already advantaged by class and gender. I am going to argue that in South University even the male students who contribute most to class discussions, in comparison to the modes of participation at West University, appear to occupy a feminised position in classroom interactions. In order to construct this argument I am going to describe the positions available to students in the South University classes.

Some features of included positions, as already suggested in the introduction to this chapter, are applicable to groups in both universities. Both Will and Gabor, two of the students who participated most regularly in South University class discussions, had a personal interest in politics. Gabor mentioned an interest in politics as a possible future career. Will's interest was expressed more as a concern to develop and justify his own political commitments. He explained questions he had raised in class in relation to Rousseau and Burke in terms of questions he had about his own political affiliations. In the class he had suggested that 'Rousseau and Burke are almost products of different political conditions' (Rousseau and Burke, 52). He explained this intervention during his interview:

...I'm kind of interested in, I suppose, because of my own political background, not that I've got a political background, but I mean, in my own personal views, I suppose, that influence my thought. If things aren't popular, if something is true but it's not popular, I'm sort of interested in the way that people, rather than making the ideas popular, in terms of infiltrating those ideas into a more popular consensus, or view. And that's why I'm sort of interested in New Labour things and stuff like that ... I thought that in terms of, whereas Rousseau might have appealed in revolutionary France, it wouldn't necessarily have appealed in England. And therefore, to a certain extent, you know. But liberals did adapt their thinking to include more social aspects in their philosophy. So I'm quite interested in that: how political thought adapts to circumstances of an electorate, or a citizenship.'

(Will, South University, interview)

Will is explaining his interest in the relationship between historical circumstance and political thought in terms of own interest in, and he confirmed later support for, New Labour's move away from some of the central tenets of socialism. As such, he is able to relate disciplinary issues within Political Thought to his own sense of his position within the political system. However, he is very hesitant about identifying himself with such a position, retracting his claim to political experience as soon as he has made it, saying, 'not that I've got a political background', and avoiding generalising the significance of his observations, saying 'I'm quite interested in', rather than claiming the obvious and universal importance of his personal interest. This contrasts with Tom's use of the universalising 'we' in the West University class.

Thus, despite conforming to some of the features of inclusion, both Will and Gabor participate in the classes in a way that is very different from the (mostly) male students at West University. Both are hesitant in articulating their opinions. Gabor, for example, who appeared relatively familiar with some of the theories discussed in the classes, who had attended Soviet schools, and had already studied Politics for a year at a university in the US, nevertheless modifies his response to a question about Marx's conception of history:

11. Bill (tutor): (...) Marx doesn't, like Hegel, say that communism is the end of history. He says it's the end of pre-history. What might he mean by that?
  12. Gabor: It probably depends on your definition of what history is. Probably he defines it as class struggle, and that dies out with communist society and therefore... (interrupted)
  13. Bill: Yes, that's our point here, yes ...
- (South University, Marx)

There are several ways of explaining Gabor's insertion of 'probably' before each statement. It would seem plausible, for example, to suggest that he is responding to the use of 'might' in Bill's question, which to some extent limits the possible modality of the response. Also, the mere fact that he is responding to the teacher's question, arguably, requires some sort of a deferral, 'doesn't he say...?', 'could it be..?', 'probably...', to avoid suggesting either to the teacher or to other students that the answer is obvious. Both of these explanations conform to the description of the feminised position as prioritising non-academic criteria for performance within the context of the classroom. Where academic criteria dominate, the culture encourages

students to express their own ideas in relation to the text. Where, in contrast, academic criteria are subordinated to other curricula factors, cultural codes may encourage deferral on the part of students, in relation to both tutor and text. Within the classroom, Gabor is not able to produce the type of confident and assertive academic performance that dominates the West University classroom. However, his description of the classes constructs them as a place where such discussions do take place. He liked the classes because, he said:

I like the discussions, and obviously I like understanding things, and since I feel I can understand it, a sense of accomplishment, I guess.

(Gabor, South University, interview)

The fact that there are relatively few discussions in the class, and that when Gabor does speak, he tends to be cut off fairly quickly by the tutor, suggests that his account here is highly selective. It may be possible to suggest that by emphasising his feelings of success he is able to resist the feminising effects of the limited opportunities for discussion actually available in the class.

There is evidence of a similar feminisation of students in other interventions. The prioritisation of codes of deference is evident in the presentation of statements as questions, and in the excessive qualification of knowledge claims. Omar, another male student who contributed quite regularly in the South University classes asked a question about the interpretation of the state of nature in Rousseau's work. In a later intervention, the same point is presented as a statement. In both instances the lecturer responds as if he has been asked a question:

42. Omar: Would you agree that in Rousseau the ideal society was savage society, as opposed to civilised society, because in savage society everyone was equal, but in civilised society, because of property and government, there are inequalities?

43. Bill (tutor): He says, no. I mean, he has a particular criteria for a civilised society, he specifically talks (looks for section in book) ... let's read it ... 'The mere impulse of appetite is slavery, while obedience to a law which we prescribe to ourselves is liberty.'

(South University, Rousseau and Burke)

This interchange is repeated almost exactly some time later in the session:

50. Omar: I think he believes that man in a state of nature is stronger, healthier and happier. Civilisation brings about misery that makes man weaker and obedient.
51. Bill: He says that in several places, but, it isn't civilisation, it's the societies based on inequality and lack of freedom that makes people like that ...
- (Omar does not contribute again on this issue.)
- (South University, Rousseau and Burke)

There are several factors limiting Omar's interventions in these examples. Again, the culture of the class and the expectation of deference to the tutor's knowledge mean that even when Omar clearly states his opinion, it is corrected by the lecturer, rather than explored as a potentially valid interpretation. This effectively excludes two lines of discussion that are both evident in the West University classroom. The first is the exploration of different possible interpretations of texts. In the West University group, on several occasions, the students offer and argue for their own specific interpretations (notably in the sessions on Hobbes and Mill). The second line of discussion that is effectively excluded by the culture of the South University classroom is the development and articulation of the students' own views, or positions, in relation to the issues raised by the set authors. In the West University sessions on Rousseau there were several extended discussions of the meaning of freedom in the context of the state of nature. This type of discussion offers students an opportunity to take up the position of subject in relation to the concepts of the discipline. The lack of such opportunities is effectively, therefore, a feminised position.

Will, the only student in the South University group to engage with Bill, the lecturer, in extended discussions of particular ideas, also tends to formulate points as questions directed at the tutor. This is exemplified in his identification of a contradiction in Burke's objection to progress and radical change:

12. Will: How would Burke reconcile the fact that in order for. What's been built up by ancestors may have been as a result of the sort of change and progressive thinking that he's opposed to?
- ...
- (South University, Rousseau and Burke)

The tutor responded to this question by constructing Burke's probable response to Will's criticism. During the session, Will continued to argue his point with the tutor,

and eventually, after a fairly lengthy dialogue, Bill acknowledged the logical point and conceded:

25. Bill: ... No, he doesn't have an answer to your point, which is that the things that are natural change within the conservative social order may at an earlier stage have looked like extreme critique of it ... what was mad revolution-ism two hundred years before his day is now acceptable because it has come in slowly. He doesn't have an answer to your point.  
(South University, Rousseau and Burke)

At this point in the discussion, then, it could be argued that Will has set the terms of the discussion and has produced an independent position in relation to Burke's concepts. However, slightly ironically since Bill in fact agreed with Will's argument, when we discussed this extract in his interview Will appears to move closer to the reconstruction of Burke's position that Bill had presented in class:

Will: I can understand where Burke's coming from, but it's a contradiction, I think. But then again I could find myself agreeing with it to a certain extent, because I could relate it to things like the middle east and Israel being formed and things, which with hindsight, obviously quite a contentious issue (very hesitant) but in hindsight you could argue that it was wrong, or that it wasn't thought through properly. But then I would argue now that you can't go back, you can't change things. What you might have disagreed with then you've got to accept as the status quo now.

(Will, South University, interview)

Will's use of the contemporary example to develop his position conforms to the description of the included student position, using Political Thought as an applied discipline with which to develop and justify political opinions and decisions. His overall position, however, is more ambiguous. I think the change in Will's position in relation to Burke is interesting, but also indeterminable in relation to his positioning within a 'masculine' or a 'feminised' subject position. It would be possible to argue that his change of opinion reveals an instability that constitutes a feminised position. However, it would be equally possible to argue that it is actually the active construction of an independent position that is visible in his development of his opinion. Nevertheless, despite this indeterminacy, Will's extreme hesitancy contrasts strikingly with the assurance of the claims asserted by (mostly) male students in the West University classroom. Even if you decide that in terms of disciplinary content Will's contribution

constitutes a defining, masculine position, the structure of his initial intervention as a question, his hesitancy and lack of confidence are nevertheless feminising traits.

These instances of competent male students occupying feminised subject positions in the classroom can, speculatively, be explained in terms of the overall social relations that produce each interaction. Two main constituents of these social relations include, firstly, the educational backgrounds and approaches of the students, which constitute the social composition of the group, and secondly, the tutor's interventions and style of teaching, which can be related to his knowledge and expectations about their personal educational histories. Both of these are intertwined with the institutional history of the department and the university.

## **5.5 Reading practices as an exemplar of institutional cultures**

The students' approaches to reading can be used as an exemplar of the difference between the two departments in the production of student positions. As I have suggested, the South and West University groups are vastly different in terms of the social and educational backgrounds of the students. These differences affect both individual and institutional practices in relation to course reading. In West University there was a clear and justified expectation that students would generally have done some reading for each of their seminars. One or two students were required to do a presentation each week, but a majority of the students who weren't doing the presentation also appeared to have done at least some of the reading, and those who hadn't would apologise or express embarrassment. Additionally, the structure of the course, with the seminar timetabled separately from the lecture, provided some support for students in their reading, since the seminar usually focussed on an author introduced in the previous lecture. In their interviews, West University students described their understanding of the reading as the basis for the seminar discussions:

Tom: The classes are just to further your understanding of what you've read and take in other people's points of view, because it's always the case that some people read different things into it, or someone will have read a different secondary source with different criticisms.

(Tom, West University, interview)

Charlotte: ... I'd read the primary text and then I'd read other sources, and you go into a class and I think you could kind of tell who had read what, because people echoed different readers' interpretations ... In the second term I decided to be much more specific, so thinkers that I didn't think I'd get really well, or be really interested in, I'd just sort of scan over, read an essay in 'Plato to Nato' or something ... and then people that I'd done before and I thought, 'right, I'm really interested in them, I'll probably do them in the exam', I spent more than one week on those, and I would go through the whole set text and I'd make notes and I'd read other books and things.

(Charlotte, West University, interview)

Tom and Charlotte not only share the assumption that their reading will be the basis for class discussions, they assume that in most cases students will have read both primary and secondary sources. According to Charlotte, the very least reading she will have done will be to read an essay in a secondary source.

The assumptions about reading in South University were dramatically different. Neither the lecturer nor the students assumed that the students would do any reading prior to the seminar. Both Nadia and Will suggested that they would find the reading too difficult:

Will: I've got a lot of books out of the library and things, and I find, you know, even quite a general text book about Political Thought quite a difficult read, and that's before going to the source text, like for the Greek philosophers. And I just think that I'd not be able to make head or tail of them, you know, I've got to be honest. Although I might understand the general rules from the lecture, I can almost guarantee that if I read something by Aristotle it would just confuse me.

(Will, South University, interview)

Nadia: I do a bit of reading after the classes, but not generally before. I won't sort of research what we will be doing, which isn't a good thing, because then you can have more of an input and have a better argument. (...) Maybe I wouldn't understand it. I mean, I haven't really attempted to, but I don't know if I would understand it, if I did the reading on my own. But I suppose that at least if you have an idea you can ask questions if you don't understand something, in the seminar, as opposed to reading it and thinking actually now I'm confused.

(Nadia, South University, interview)

Both of these students express an extreme lack of confidence in their ability to understand the reading on their own, but it also appears that neither of them has made a

sustained effort to do so: Will's suggestion 'I can almost guarantee that if I read something by Aristotle it would just confuse me', indicates that he has not in fact tried this; Nadia is more explicit, 'I haven't really attempted to, but I don't know if I would understand'. Nadia does concede that reading before the seminar would be useful, but the general lack of expectation that this will happen, I would imagine, makes it unlikely that she will alter her current practice. There is no evidence from my data that these students' extreme lack of confidence in their reading skills is simply or directly related to actual literacy abilities, and it is worth noting that Tom, the West University student quoted above, is dyslexic, and so both reading and writing are slow and difficult for him.

There are various possible factors that may contribute to these low expectations in relation to student reading in the South University Politics department. Bill, the South University lecturer, suggested that there was a general decline in reading, but that this general decline was exacerbated by the continuous assessment system, which, he claimed, meant that students were less willing to do work that was not assessed:

Bill: The problem is, there are two problems in pedagogic terms. One is, there is a decline in the reading culture among university students as a whole (...) And you add that into the fact that modular semesterised schemes have a tendency to over-assess, because you have to assess everything, which puts pressure on people. So those two things coming together do seem to have lead to a decline in the amount of reading (...) One is aware that the ideal situation probably, if you really want to make seminars work, would be to say everybody has to do a little presentation. But firstly, students won't do that unless it's assessed. It isn't in the culture any more. And if it is assessed in any way, you risk increasing the over-assessment problem.

(Bill, South University tutor, interview)

It is clearly arguable whether Bill is right about a general 'decline in reading culture among university students'. The comparison between the West and South University departments would suggest that a better explanation would be that there are different reading cultures in the 'traditional' and the 'non traditional' student bodies, which may then need to be taken into account in course planning. The more plausible explanation that he offers is the effect of modularisation and continuous assessment on student reading practices. The suggestion that these innovations may have a negative effect on student reading might be seen as slightly paradoxical since one justification given for



the introduction of modular courses and continuous assessment was precisely that they would increase equity and access in higher education. If in fact they have the effect of reducing student reading, then they are having the opposite of their intended effect. (If, that is, you interpret the move to widen participation as driven by an interest in equity rather than driven by an interest in economics. If the aim is simply to increase qualification levels in the workforce, then we probably don't need to worry about the fact that students aren't reading widely<sup>2</sup>.) The West University course has more traditional assessment practices. The students write four essays throughout the year, which are marked by their seminar tutor, but which do not constitute part of their formal assessment. The formal assessment is in the form of an end of year exam, in which they have to write four essays. As Charlotte's account of her reading practices indicates, the fact that students know that they will be eventually assessed in an exam does influence reading practices, and all students said that they did more work on the authors they expected to write on in the exam. Nevertheless, the students did still read, or feel some obligation to read in areas they were not going to write on. So this fact complicates, but does not necessarily completely negate Bill's account of the specific influence of continuous assessment on student reading practices. Assessment procedures, institutional culture and student social and educational background clearly all play a part in the production of such practices.

Student reading practices, then, are evidently and inextricably bound up within both individual social and educational backgrounds and institutional missions and curricula. These interwoven factors affect the positions available to students within seminars, and ultimately contribute to the production of the feminised, deferential student positions visible within the South University Political Thought class.

## **5.6. Tutor positions within classroom interactions**

A final factor to consider in the production of masculine or feminised student positions is the tutors' interventions and teaching styles. As with the reading practices, these can

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<sup>2</sup> For a useful discussion of the contradictions within aims of 'widening participation' and the expansion of the HE system, see Taylor et al 2002 (esp. p. 14 and p. 94). See also Robbins, 1988.

be related both to institutional factors and also to personal factors relating to the educational background and interests of the tutor. As I have suggested, Alison's style in the West University classroom is explicitly student-centred. She asks questions to elicit students' views, she encourages students to respond to each others' points, and she explicitly asks for the opinions of quieter students. Bill's approach is more didactic and teacher-centred. He begins each seminar by asking for questions or comments from the students and his responses to student questions focus mainly on exposition of the set authors rather than on the analysis of concepts.

These differences can be accounted for in a variety of ways. West University put a strong emphasis on student participation in seminars: there was even a rumour that class tutors were explicitly directed not to intervene to fill silences if students didn't respond to a question. The rumour might have been a little extreme, but the ethos behind it was confirmed by the course co-ordinator:

Cheryl: Some teachers are more proactive than others. I have one teacher in particular who, if there is a blank in the discussion is more than fearless, really. But the ideal class is one where the teacher says very little and where the students do the work.

(Cheryl, West University course co-ordinator + lecturer, interview)

Another possible factor that may have facilitated student participation is the fact that the seminar tutor was a post-graduate student, and not the course lecturer. It is certainly the case that the students did not feel intimidated by Alison: the more vocal male students interrupted and contradicted her frequently in the seminars and the quieter female students that I interviewed all commented on how well she had managed to facilitate their participation. Alison herself provides a more personal rationale for the approach she takes in the classes. She produced the following account in response to, or perhaps in explanation of, a slightly unfocussed extract of class discussion, where students had been expressing views on whether people are essentially group oriented, or whether they are essentially individual and only gather together to further individual interests:

Alison: (...) In so far as they have been talking about what drives political communities, it's an issue that's very important (...) I don't think they will get it now, but hopefully later, as long as they think about it. I really am interested in getting people to think about certain issues. Sometimes the spelling out can be too much. If I just went there and said 'you mean this and

this'. I don't want them to feel that they're being put in a box, I don't want them to feel 'this is where I stand'. Yes, once you're past a certain level you can do that. You can align yourself with this and that positions, but what I really want them to do, on this course, is to think about issues. To see that there are issues, and to see that they can deal with them, would be more important for me than saying 'I'm a liberal', 'I'm a communitarian' (...) to come out understanding the things we're looking at rather than categorising them.

(Alison, West University tutor, interview, p. 5 - 6)

There are two aspects to Alison's account here. Firstly, she prioritises developing students' sense of real conceptual controversies over the precise detail of specific arguments and positions: 'I am really interested in getting people to think about certain issues. Sometimes the spelling out can be too much.'. This relates to the second aspect, which is her desire for the students to develop their own response to each issue before they begin to identify with generalised categories such as 'liberal', or 'communitarian'. Both of these aspects of her account can be related to her own academic position and educational experience. She describes her discomfort with the need to take up a position in her thesis:

Alison: My position is quite unclear ... the position I take in my thesis is probably quite different to what I take as a person. The position I take in my thesis is quite left wing, I would say: egalitarian, liberal egalitarian, residual Marxist. Purely pragmatic so I can get it out of the way ...

(Alison, West University tutor, interview)

This sense of conforming to disciplinary conventions rather than expressing her own ideas is also evident in her description of her previous educational experience as 'stifling', which has influenced her genuinely student-centred approach and her interest in eliciting students' own opinions:

Alison: In their discussions there is a balancing act between not letting things go completely off and on the other hand not stifling them when they're eighteen, when they are still very eager and they're curious. And my personal experience has been of being stifled, and so maybe I tend to let them go on because I think, okay, practice in saying something, practice in just communicating to others what you think, because sometimes that's harder than stringing together logical sentences, is to make yourself understood (...) at eighteen they're adults, they've got to work it out themselves. I don't see myself as being a pedagogue in that sense. I'd rather like to see

myself opening them up, saying, 'go on, go on, think something different'. (Alison, West University tutor, interview)

The stifling that Alison described related to her experience as an undergraduate and also to her initial experience as a postgraduate student at West University, where:

Alison: You felt you could never talk to them (the lecturers) because they would never, never take you seriously, because you'd always be a little puny student.  
(Alison, West University tutor, interview)

This experience might be considered surprising in the light of the fact that Alison herself comes from an academic family, and so might be expected to feel comfortable in an academic context. However, she said that she felt her experience of academic Political Thought in the UK was very different from her experience of academic ways of thinking in her family, which is based in Europe:

Alison: My very deep feeling is that now, sometimes I find political theorists very difficult to discuss anything with, because once they have a position, they have it, and, I suppose my personal training, I come from an academic family, I was trained to be more fluid. You don't have to come up with essences (...) It's more like exercising the limits of your thoughts, what you can conceive of in a situation.  
(Alison, West University tutor, interview)

Alison's experience of being 'stifled' can also be related to gender. When I asked her about gender in the classroom, she said she had never really thought about it, because she automatically accepted that she would be 'downgraded' because of being a woman:

Alison: Perhaps I'm more oblivious to the gender issues, perhaps also because I'm used to, from my upbringing in India and also from my continental upbringing, already you just feel downgraded as a woman anyway. So my expectations are probably extremely low.  
(Alison, West University tutor, interview)

Alison's strong sense of having been stifled both in her academic and in her educational experience contributed to her developing a teaching style that allowed students to express their ideas in a way which conformed with the pedagogic ideal set out by the department. It might almost be argued that she is allowing the 'stifling' she experienced

as a student to be re-enacted upon her by her (male) students, when they interrupt and contradict her. She is, perhaps, similar to Charlotte in having constructed an extremely coherent and justifiable rationale for re-occupying this highly feminised position.

Bill, the South University Political Thought lecturer is almost the exact inverse of Alison in teaching style, in academic position, and in educational experience. He was from a working class family, but went to a very competitive grammar school, where he did A-levels early and then spent a further year in the sixth form preparing for his first year at Oxford. So by the time he arrived there he was already partially inducted into Oxford's elite academic culture. In addition, he was also already confident of his Marxist politics, and in support of this his college at Oxford arranged for him to take several of his courses with Marxist academics from other colleges. In discussion of his teaching he articulated an explicit commitment to principles of educational equity. However, his active political work was generally directed at the level of national policy rather than at the level of the classroom. Unlike Alison, Bill had a clear sense of boundaries for legitimate discussion in the classroom, and was uncomfortable when the discussion moved away from the academic agenda. The section of his account I am going to look at was given in response to, or in explanation of, a section of discussion in the class on Marx where several students who did not speak much in the classes had contributed, not only expressing their own opinions but also responding directly to each other.

33. Bill: Does anybody else want to join in?
34. Andy: Yes. I just want to say, if someone lives in a capitalist society, the proletariat, I don't see how they're going to have no self interest. Because who wants to give up their life in a capitalist society? I don't. I just can't see it. Because who wants to give up their lives to be equal?
35. Guy: I just don't see how you can say that. Considering, just take, Gap for example, it's a sweat shop and it's like an institution. And it's fundamentally immoral. I don't see how, I don't mean to be rude, but to make that statement. How someone can be so ignorant for other people.
36. Andy: Most people agree with what...
37. Tamsin: But I don't think he meant it in terms of that. Some people work hard for their material gain, and I think he means the person who makes it, why should he give up his earnings just for the sake of a communist state. I mean, you know, I didn't gain any of my material possessions on immoral gain, or whatever.
38. Guy: I wouldn't have thought. No one's saying to give it up. I thought the whole point of it was to make it better without exploiting anyone...

(South University, Marx)

This type of general discussion only occurred twice during the sessions that I observed at South University, and on each occasion Bill fairly quickly drew the discussion to a close, returning to his own exposition of the set author:

40. Bill: This is where it's difficult to debate it without Marx's political economy, because Marx in his political economy argues a number of things ... (Bill continues, explaining Marx's position).

(South University, Marx)

In his interview Bill explained his discomfort with this type of discussion, and the dilemmas it presented to him as a tutor:

Bill: This is a very confused debate. I remember it actually. It didn't focus in on arguments, or rather, it was about people's gut assumptions about politics. (...) That was where I deliberately sat back, because I could see it was chaotic and I wanted to let it go for a bit. Also because, being a Marx person, I was worried about taking it over completely (...) I think you have to allow that space to happen, because if people are thinking in chaotic ways they have to have the opportunity for that to emerge. I think what I tried to do here was to allow people space, and then come in with a long and heavy bit, probably much too long, looking at this. (...) I'm letting it go, because people are actually cutting in and engaging, even if they're doing it in this rather chaotic way. And they're using the space for something in a way that it's not supposed to be for, but in a way it's not a bad thing, that is, to start saying something about their own ideas about politics. And they're very chaotic ideas ...

(Bill, South University tutor, interview)

Bill's dilemma was whether and how long to allow the discussion to continue, since it is 'using the space for something ... that it's not supposed to be for'. While he does seem to value the fact that 'people are actually cutting in and engaging', he does not, unlike Alison, have a clear rationale for valuing this participation regardless of the actual content of the interventions. His inclination, as we have seen already, is to 'come in with a long and heavy bit'.

As both an academic and a political activist, Bill identifies with an 'included' subject position in relation to the discipline of political thought on every significant level. In

particular, his position as a committed political activist makes it very difficult for Bill to sit back and let students take control of the discussion. He commented that:

Bill: Some people are better at remaining silent in seminars than others. I'm not up to that.

(Bill, South University tutor, interview)

His mode of participation, it could be argued, is very similar to that of some of the 'included' male students at West University and can be related to the culture of Political Thought, within which the expression and defence of your own position is the dominant mode of engagement with the discipline. This similarity may also be related to Bill's own experience of elite educational establishments in the UK. In combination with this, as I have already discussed, there is an institutional culture of low expectations of students at South University. This culture is sometimes expressed in the view that students see themselves as consumers, more concerned to get a qualification than to be inspired by ideas, and so preferring lectures to active engagement in seminars. These factors combine to produce a style of classroom interaction that structures the modes of participation available to the South University Political Thought students.

This discussion of the tutors reveals that the same factors that effect the students' positioning in relation to Political Thought also effect the tutors and their ways of understanding and responding to classroom interactions.

## **5.7. Conclusions**

What I have been describing is the way in which cultural codes that constitute teaching and learning practices in undergraduate Political Thought re-iterate existing codes of class and gender. By defining in/exclusion in terms of disciplinary methodologies, what is revealed is that even 'included' positions within university courses re-iterate structures of class and gender. Even when students identify with the conceptualisation of Political Thought as applied knowledge in the service of government, the embodiment of the discipline in the two institutions acts to maintain gender and class divisions. Rather than explicitly marginalizing or excluding students, the socially

divisive features of class and gender are incorporated into the structure of institutional practice.

So West University attaches great value to vocal academic performance within the classroom. West University also has a culture that prioritises student independent reading, which further enables students to begin to develop their own position in relation to the academic subject matter of the courses. The culture thus encourages students to occupy an unmediated, masculine position in relation to their discipline, which is consistent with the methodological structure of Political Thought. These cultural and disciplinary features constitute conflicting demands for female students who must also pay attention to regulations of femininity. Despite this prioritisation of 'masculine' positions, female students are able to construct relatively coherent positions with the course structure. In South University, low expectations of students in terms of participation and reading mean that the academic, masculine performances visible at West University are more or less unavailable in the South University classes. Instead, all students occupy a deferential, feminised position. In order for male students to construct an image of successful academic performance they may need to be selective in how they choose to represent their experience of the classes. Female students at West University, and both male and female students at South University, have to work hard to construct a successful account of their academic performance in their Political Thought classes. The socially and educationally advantaged male students at West University have less work to do.

At another level of analysis, we can describe these observations in terms of the realisation of Political Thought as a stable social identity. Political Thought cannot be constituted as an autonomous identity, but is dependent on the masculine modes of engagement enacted within privileged and elite higher education institutions. In such institutions, both the identity of Political Thought and the identity of the privileged male students who constitute the privileged institution, are overdetermined. However, the gendered practices of the female students in such institutions are in conflict with these dominant discursive fields, and thus their position and identity within the classroom can be seen as more fragile and precarious than that of their male peers.



In less privileged environments, both the identity of the students and the identity of Political Thought are more precarious. Political Thought is transformed when it is no longer the discourse of the dominant classes, since it is only through its articulation within fields of social power that it gains its identity and influence. Similarly, the students, when required to speak a disciplinary language that is couched in the confidence and authority of a class to which they do not belong, struggle to construct a coherent and successful academic identity. It is here that we see, perhaps, the exemplary antagonistic relationship: each identity preventing the other from fully constituting itself as either a stable or an autonomous social object.

## Chapter 6

# **MULTIPLE METHODOLOGIES, DISCIPLINARY CULTURES AND GENDER: THE OVERDETERMINATION OF INTERACTION IN TWO AMERICAN LITERATURE CLASSES**

### **6.1. Introduction**

Just as it is impossible to understand the Political Thought classes purely in terms of discipline, or purely in terms of gender, or institution, so too the American Literature classes are constituted through the interaction of these relatively autonomous discursive fields. In both cases, it is the coincidence of particular features of disciplinary methodology and institution that construct the specific features of student positions in the classroom. However, while in relation to Political Thought gendered performances that conform with hegemonic codes of masculinity and femininity reinforce features of the discipline that coincide with pre-existing positions of power in dominant social hierarchies, in American Literature the same gendered performances are in opposition to the position of the discipline as a critical description of hegemonic discourses. Thus, the marginalisation of certain groups of students, specifically female students and new university students, is more thoroughly overdetermined in Political Thought classrooms than in American Literature classrooms.

This chapter will suggest that there are specific features of the structure, methodology, object and culture of American Literature that constitute a greater range of possible positions from which students can identify with the discipline than are available in Political Thought. This argument also constitutes a refinement in Bernstein's account of the probable exclusionary effects of horizontal knowledge structures.

As I suggested in the introduction, Bernstein's category of horizontal knowledge structures is not fully elaborated in relation to empirical data. Thus, while I have suggested that both American Literature and Political Thought can be identified as horizontal structures, they constitute very different instantiations of Bernstein's

category that are not accounted for within his model. To re-iterate, in Bernstein's terminology, horizontal knowledge structures are disciplines that are made up of 'a series of specialised languages with specialised modes of interrogation and criteria for the construction and circulation of texts' (Bernstein, 1996, p. 161). These languages are 'not translatable, since they make different and often opposing assumptions, with each language having its own criteria for legitimate texts, what counts as evidence and what counts as legitimate questions or a legitimate problematic' (ibid, p. 162). Now, there is a clear difference between the way in which Maxism, Liberalism and Anarchism constitute such segmental and specialised languages, and the suggestion that New Criticism, historicism and feminism can be similarly described. The differences in methodologies, the criteria for what counts as evidence, are far more explicit in the different approaches within American Literature than in the different schools of Political Thought. Nevertheless, the opposing schools of Political Thought are based on contrasting conceptual premises, which ultimately constitute criteria for identifying legitimate evidence, statements and questions. It might well be argued, then, that both Political Thought and American Literature do indeed conform to the criteria of a horizontal knowledge structure, but that American Literature conforms more completely, in that the boundaries between its different methodologies are more explicit than in Political Thought. How then do these different instantiations of horizontal knowledge structures affect interaction in the classroom?

To re-iterate once more, Bernstein has suggested that: 'Because a *Horizontal Knowledge Structure* consists of an array of languages, any one transmission necessarily entails some selection, and some privileging within the set recontextualised for the transmission of the *Horizontal Knowledge Structure*' (ibid, p. 164). The basis of this selection, or privileging of one language over another, Bernstein, suggests, must be conceived of at least partially as social, rather than purely academic, and so as acting in the interests of a specific social group. This suggestion is consistent with the analysis of marginalized students presented in chapter four. It could be argued that the privileging of liberalism within the West University Political Thought module acted in the interests of West University as a whole in maintaining its position of influence within the establishment. It also, as we have seen, acted to marginalize Michael, a student who wanted to explore more critical political discourses. Similarly, Laura's position on the margins of her Political Thought class can be at least partially explained in relation to

the segmental structure of Political Thought, and the prioritisation given to Marxist approaches by the class tutor. Again, the tutor's position is consistent with the institution's sense of itself, historically and still now within some sections of the staff, as a politically radical, egalitarian educational establishment. In both these cases, then, Bernstein's assessment of the probable social effects of horizontal knowledge structures in the classroom is borne out.

The analysis of American Literature presented in this chapter, however, suggests the need for some refinement of Bernstein's categories. I will argue that a series of factors - the adoption of explicitly multi-methodological approaches; curricula content that allows students to identify with the discipline at a level that is at the same time experiential, reflexive and academic; and a culture within literary studies that allows a variety of legitimate interpretations, in contrast to Political Thought's demand for one successful outcome to an argument - combine to produce a transmission of horizontal knowledge structures that does not necessarily serve one exclusionary social interest in the way that Bernstein's model suggests. Thus it is suggested that Bernstein's self-consciously highly structural models will only act as useful tools within an analysis that also pays attention to the substantive content, culture and social positioning of disciplinary knowledge.

## **6.2. What does it mean to study literature?**

The students' descriptions of what it means to study literature reflect the variety of methodological approaches associated with contemporary literary criticism: historicism, new criticism, humanism, uses of social and psychoanalytic theory, and general concerns with issues of equity. Different students emphasised different points, but this did not mean that they were necessarily advocating one particular approach over another, and several were explicit in their desire to use a variety of methodologies.

In the interviews, I asked students to explain the nature of literary studies and I also asked about the relationship between literature and politics. There was general agreement that literary texts are in some senses political. However, the precise way in which students described this aspect of literature varied. One set of responses described

literature as necessarily political, but also suggested that literature can, and should, contain more than overt political statements:

I think looking at a book in terms of politics is interesting to a certain extent. If that's all you take the book to be, if you perceive the book in terms of a simple tension between two political regimes or two political ideologies, I don't think it would be enough. Literature should have something more. Politics is one of the constituent parts of a book.

(Rajpal, North University, interview)

Maybe it's hard not to be political when you're writing, because everyone had their own beliefs and they come through in what you're writing. So some people, like in the book we read today, 'Life in the Iron Mills', that was overtly political, trying to make a point. But you can make a point without it being like that. Literature definitely does that.

(Sevket, North University, interview)

Both of these students suggest that literature is inherently political: Sevket says, 'everyone has their own beliefs and they come through in what you're writing', and Rajpal implies the same thing when he says, 'Politics is one of the constituent parts of a book'. Both, however, are looking for something more than politics in their reading of literature.

Other students defined the political aspect of literature more narrowly, seeing the relationship between literature and politics as inherently related to issues of equity:

(Literature) is not how it used to be understood, as studying dead white poets and playwrights. It's much bigger than that now, which is brilliant. It's just looking at other people's work. I think it means taking a whole range of books of people from totally diverse backgrounds, from different time periods, and just looking at them and enjoying them. You've got to enjoy the texts or else they won't mean anything to you.'

(Monica, East University, interview)

I think more often than not politics and literature are synonymous, aren't they? I don't know exactly why (...) It depends how many political courses you choose to do. There are lots of courses that, you know, aren't considered the canonical courses to do. We have loads with sort of black writing, the African American writing, the post-colonial writing. There's lots of courses which have a totally political credo at the centre of them.

(Ambia, North University, interview)

Monica and Ambia both identify the curriculum and the inclusion of non-canonical texts as a central feature of the politicisation of literary studies. Monica explained her interest in this aspect of literature in relation to her longstanding interest in racism and racial thinking and Ambia said that she had originally chosen the North University English course because it offered this range of option modules.

An alternative to this explicit political agenda is expressed in the conceptualisation of literature as a way of understanding specific historical or geographical contexts. This view is in some ways closest to the way both of the tutors presented their American Literature modules:

To be able to evaluate particular things in texts and actually get an understanding of a particular period, the historical aspect as well...

(Helen, East University, interview)

The texts that he's picked are really conscious about being American Literature. So, um, I think it's about kind of the position of the country and then he's been asking questions like, 'what does it mean to be American', and all of this.

(Rose, North University, interview)

Both Helen and Rose's accounts suggest that literature offers a way of developing your understanding of a place, or of a period in history, in a way that is not explicitly politicised, and which may perhaps be seen to offer a more objective type of knowledge. While the previous accounts prioritise the literary text as the object of study, identifying ways in which a work of literature itself might be analysed as a political object, Helen and Iris at this point are prioritising a historical or geographical object of study, which can be examined through the lens of literary texts.

Another student, Hamid, suggests that the study of literature can offer a more politicised understanding of society in general. He identifies literature's appropriation of social and psychological theories as providing the link between the literary and the social:

By reading theories you understand something, they are basic things in your life, for example Freud's theories, or Karl Marx's theories, or feminism theories or this stuff. You sometimes know, in everyday life you know about the repression of black people, or the repression of women, or the repression of the poor classes, or working classes. But sometimes it's hard to find

out the roots, where does this repression come from, or why doesn't anything relieve this. But in reading this, or in applying this to, for example, we read a lot of fiction, you become conscious that this is the reason and this is the cause, and what you can do.

(Hamid, East University, interview)

Here Hamid suggests that the theories of, for example, Freud and Marx offer an insight into different types of social oppression, and that this insight can be developed when you apply their theories in your reading of literary texts. Sevket makes a similar point about the way literary texts can offer an understanding of contemporary issues, when he contrasts historicised readings with contemporising approaches:

Duncan looks at the writer's life and the historical situation of the time the book was written. Which I also think is quite a good way of understanding the book (...) other lecturers might contemporise a play or a book, like, Shakespeare is a good example, will analyse Shakespeare and talk about issues from the twentieth century.

(Sevket, North University, interview)

Monica also suggested that the study of literature had developed her understanding of social issues and the way language in particular influences the way we categorise the world, concluding:

The impact that words have on everyday life is amazing.

(Monica, East University, interview)

Monica, Hamid and Sevket all suggest that the study of literature can enhance your understanding of contemporary social issues and therefore, according to Hamid, your ability to act by identifying, Hamid says, 'what you can do'.

The accounts so far all, in some way or other, prioritise the social or political resonance of literature. Students also talked about specifically literary aspects of texts, referring to New Criticism and to humanistic and subjective features of literature and reading.

The humanistic account of literature is one way of describing the 'something more' that Rajpal and Sevket suggested literature has to offer in addition to political or ideological statements. Sevket and Hamid both offered explicitly humanistic accounts of literature:

One of my teachers told me as well that English is about understanding the workings of the human heart, so it's very, sort of, out there. You can make of it what you will, sort of thing.  
(Sevket, North University, interview)

I think that literature, studying literature gives you insight, it's kind of understanding yourself, understanding others, it's a kind of mutual relationship.  
(Hamid, East University, interview)

Both of these students appear to value the specific types of insight that are offered in literary writing. Rajpal offered an alternative account of what is specific to literature. He talked about the way texts produce meaning through linguistic mechanisms, referring to the New Critics and their prioritisation of the textual aspects of literature: texts as texts:

I'd like to do a fusion of different types of readings. I can see where the New Critics, how they see literature as being constructed through lots of systems, as being familiar or de-familiarisation, word play, ambiguity, metaphors, quotes, all that.  
(Rajpal, North University, interview)

Humanism and New Criticism both offer ways of thinking about what constitutes a literary text. These unique characteristics of literariness also influence the ways that texts can be analysed, and the explicitly interpretive or subjective nature of literary analysis. This subjective aspect of the discipline was highly valued by the students:

At A-level they always used to say, there's no right answer. And I always used to love that idea in English... if you can explain your opinion well enough, and you have evidence and you can back it up, and you can prove, at least to some degree that what you're saying is viable, then there can never be a wrong answer.  
(David, North University, interview)

English is sort of like an interpretive course, well, a lot of courses are ... maybe English is more about how I feel about a text and maybe Economics is more about a theory and a set formula.  
(Sevket, North University, interview)

A connection can be made between the subjectivity of individual readings of a text and the personal experience that students bring to their reading. Although no-one explicitly mentioned this when defining the discipline, both in the classes and in interviews,



students introduced personal experience and interests as a reference point in their interpretations of texts: their experience of being a woman in a specific time and place, their experience as a member of a religion or a specific ethnic group, an interest in racism and racial thinking, or their experience of living in London, growing up in contemporary society and consuming contemporary culture. I will explore some examples of these personal references in more detail in section four of this chapter.

Connections can also be made between the multiple approaches to the discipline and the opportunities available for students to explore both personal and literary interests within the boundaries of the course. Students are able to articulate their interest in and commitment to specific issues and ideas through a variety of methodologies within the classroom, ranging from primarily literary to primarily political or sociological modes of analysis. It is this feature of the course that I am going to explore in the next section.

### **6.3. Student analyses of ‘race’ using different methodological approaches**

I am going to use the class discussions of ‘race’, or racial thinking, to exemplify how students used a variety of methodological approaches to analyse the set texts. These approaches can broadly be divided into two groups. Within the first set of approaches, texts are read and analysed through a prior understanding of racism and racial stereotypes. This prior understanding provides a language with which to label texts as ‘racist’ or ‘progressive’. The second set of approaches attempts to understand the way the text can be interpreted as a challenge to hegemonic conceptualisations of racial categories. Both approaches are valid within the American Literature classes, although both tutors can probably be more closely identified with the second approach than with the first.

An example of the first approach can be taken from the East University discussion of *Moby Dick*. Errol’s account of the beginning of the novel, when Ismael, the white narrator, tentatively meets and then becomes friends with Queequeg, a Polynesian from the Pacific Islands, sets up an opposition between features that might identify the text as ‘racist’ or ‘progressive’. To be ‘racist’, in the terms used in these interventions, means to treat black people as unequal, to be suspicious of black people, to think white people

are superior in some way, or to use negative terms such as 'savage' and 'cannibal' to describe people from non white ethnic groups. Errol describes Ismael's first responses to Queequeg:

88. Errol: When he first met Queequeg, and then, when he talks about the docks, it's one of the only places in America where you can see cannibals, and don't think twice about them, and I thought that was a bit weird. And then this whole bonding thing, that kind of struck me as very anti slavery, I mean, a very abolitionist way of thinking. I think he said something about, 'if any of us is anything but a whitewashed Negro'. It's weird that he's kind of in a place where he keeps describing them as savages, cannibals. You don't get the sense that he looks down on them, but that's natural, all of the thinking that these people have, and then he switches it. I mean he constantly does it, because he was one hundred percent against sleeping in the bed with anybody, let alone a savage, and then it was as though they were in love half the while, so, I think he keeps switching. You tend to get a one sided view, and then all of a sudden, he completely changes it to the opposite view. I think the race theme or whatever was like that. At one stage you thought, he's probably like most people who have never met or talked to a black person before or whatever, and then, all of a sudden you talk to them and they say, "oh, they're alright, they're fine, they're just like us". You got that sense of, "oh, my best mate's black, so I'm not racist", something like that.

(North University, *Moby Dick* 1)

Errol appears slightly confused by the text, identifying what he interprets as contradictory positions in relation to 'race': Ismael doesn't seem to look down on black people but he doesn't want to share his bed with a 'savage', but he expresses egalitarian sentiments, saying we're all 'whitewashed Negroes'. Errol's account initially represents *Moby Dick*, embodied in the character of Ismael, through the codified opposition between 'racist' and 'abolitionist', or 'progressive', but as he continues it becomes apparent that the text 'keeps switching', and thus confounds these categories. Errol tries to explain this 'switching' by historicizing it, suggesting that the disjuncture between Ismael's 'racist' language and his more tolerant features is 'natural, all of the thinking that these people have' – which I interpret as a reference to the opinions and language that prevailed in the period in which the novel was set. In this historicisation, Errol begins to develop a more sophisticated account of racism and to move beyond a simplistic application of the labels 'racist' or 'progressive'. He also explicitly relates the text to his own experience, as a black man, of a certain type of racism when he suggests that Ismael is 'probably like most people who have never met or never talked to a black

person, and then all of a sudden you talk to them and they say, “oh they’re alright, they’re fine, they’re just like us”.’ So, it would appear, Errol reads not only initially through the set categories of ‘racist’ and ‘progressive’, but also through his own experience.

Helen, another student in the East University class, more explicitly attempted to categorise the novel as either ‘racist’ or ‘progressive’. During the class, in response to Errol’s intervention, she suggested that the relationship between Queequeg and Ismael was a ‘progressive’ feature of the novel:

89. Helen: I found it quite progressive because I didn’t think someone at that time would have accepted him (Queequeg) so willingly, he (Ismael) did have reservations, but after the bed incident he kind of like accepted him, although he did have his ideas of race before. I just found that quite progressive.

(East University, Moby Dick 1)

However, when we discussed the extract in her interview she had changed her mind and expressed regret that she hadn’t said what she (now) thought. She argued that despite their close friendship the relationship between Ismael and Queequeg is unequal, with Ismael in the dominant position. Further, she says, the representations of the non-white people throughout the novel are negative and conform to stereotypes of black people as ‘horrific’ and ‘frightening’:

Helen: ... I just felt that it was that Robinson Crusoe, Friday relationship. I got a sense of that because I felt that he always felt that he was above Queequeg. He was actually better than him. In some respects he did respect his knowledge and his ability as a good harpoonist, but he still felt that he was above him (...) the negative descriptions of the non-white people on the boat, it’s quite, I thought, in some ways, horrific, the descriptions of Queequeg in the beginning were quite frightening, whereas Ahab (a white character) was mysterious, just mysterious, but he wasn’t seen to be grotesque. Even the description of the leg wasn’t grotesque.

(Helen, East University, interview)

At the end of this extract, Helen identifies specific features of the novel, and explains how they seem to her to present characters within racial stereotypes. This way of

understanding the literary repetition of stereotypes as necessarily racist, is repeated by several students in the American Literature groups<sup>1</sup>:

46. Dean: What I found quite interesting is, Melville tries to subvert the popular belief of what savages are, but he gives Queequeg an occupation which is very violent, and he carries a harpoon around with him all the time.

(North University, Moby Dick 1)

Dean, like Helen, starts from the assumption that the repetition of stereotypes is wrong, and then identifies stereotypes in the text in order to demonstrate that it is not progressive. This approach to textual analysis, while not always very sophisticated, allows students to develop and apply their own conception of what it means to be racist, which appears to be a concern for some individuals in the classes<sup>2</sup>.

Both tutors respond to this type of intervention by trying to relate, or contrast it with a more textual or theorised interpretation of racial ideologies. Other students in both classes offered interpretations that were closer to what the tutor was looking for. One student followed Dean's intervention with a contrasting interpretation of the novel's conceptualisation of 'savagery':

50. Lou: We were talking about the ideas 'civilised' and 'savage', and how it's not just a racial divide. How you have Queequeg and the other harpooners who are the other more exotic characters, and then you have Ahab, who's the white representative. And then you have Queequeg on the one hand who when one of the other guys falls into the sea, jumps off and goes and rescues him. And then you have Ahab on the other hand, who, when at the end they meet the Rachel, the ship, and the guy is looking for his son, and he's begging him to come and help him looking for his son, and Ahab says 'no'. So you see a lot of savagery coming out in the white characters.

(North University, Moby Dick 1)

This is a textual analysis of the way Melville presents and then undermines racial associations of savagery, through juxtaposition of events at different points in the novel. Queequeg and the other 'exotic' characters are the harpooners, and so, as Dean

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<sup>1</sup> This is also similar to the discussion of the animalisation of black people in 'Benito Cereno', discussed in chapter 3.

<sup>2</sup> A more explicit development of a conception of what it means to be racist was carried out by Peter, in his essay on slavery.

suggested, associated with savagery. But Queequeg is also depicted as honourable and humane, in contrast to Ahab, the white, authoritarian captain of the whale ship, who is depicted as savage. In his interview, Duncan, the tutor's initial response to this extract in comparison with Dean's earlier intervention was that it is, 'much more like something that I would say' and that it 'moves the conversation onto another level' (Duncan interview). However, despite his apparent preference for this type of reading over the other, both methods of analysis are legitimate within the class. In fact, in the class on 'Benito Cereno', another story by Melville, Duncan explicitly set out to present the two contrasting ways of reading as providing equally viable interpretations of the text. Duncan acknowledged this difference in his approach to teaching the two texts, *Moby Dick* and 'Benito Cereno':

I think it's right that I was teaching *Moby Dick* in a more utopian way, whereas I might be rather more sensible in thinking that 'Benito Cereno' was actually contaminated by the same racial thinking that it critiques (...) I think a more nuanced reading of *Moby Dick* is one that says that, yes, as well as critiquing racial thinking it does implement racial thinking, and I'm sure that's closer to the ultimate position one might want to have about the text than saying that this is Melville, in a very prescient way, deconstructing racial thinking, because I don't think that's the case.

(Duncan, North University tutor, interview)

The reason this is significant is that Duncan, here, explicitly identifies both methodologies as valid: the application of external criteria to define 'racism' as well as the textual analysis of the novel's internal development, or subversion, of concepts are both seen as appropriate tools in the construction of an overall interpretation of the novel.

I want to look at one last example of the way a student used the set text to develop an understanding of racial thinking. Here, Sevkett uses an analysis of Spike Lee's film *Bamboozled* to theorise about the nature of stereotypes, and identifies similarities between the film and 'Benito Cereno', the set text. Spike Lee's film is full of characters who conform to different racial and gender stereotypes. However, Sevkett argues that the use of such stereotypes within the film is not itself racist, but rather constitutes an analysis and implicit critique of racial thinking:

76. Sevket: I don't know if anyone has seen a Spike Lee film called *Bamboozled*? It was like, there is a minstrel film in the twenty-first century (...) It's a good film. And it's basically, he's saying, there's a black writer, and he has to come up with something good, otherwise he's going to get fired by the white boss, who's really quite racist (...) And he creates the most racist TV show he can think of, which is a twenty-first century black minstrel show, and it becomes the most popular TV show in America. So, it's like, I think Spike Lee makes the point that our access to foreign people, to black people, to the black body or Asian body, or whatever, is through stereotypes. I think that that's going on in this country as well. In advertising, in film, everything. And maybe (...) Melville's using stereotypes and that's how we access seeing people.

(North University, Benito Cereno)

The interventions I described earlier identified ways that texts present characters within racial stereotypes, using the concept of stereotypes as a tool rather than as the object of analysis. Here Sevket suggests that the texts under discussion are actually exploring the way stereotypes work in society: that 'Spike Lee makes the point that our access to foreign people ... is through stereotypes'. He is not arguing about the status of the film as 'racist' or 'progressive'. He is developing a way of understanding the mechanisms by which racial ideas permeate society. The reference to a contemporary text exemplifies another way in which students read through their personal and cultural experience. Other students also mentioned contemporary films they had seen and books they had read, in order to develop their interpretations of the set texts. In addition, Sevket's explicit reference to his belief that such racial thinking 'is going on in this country as well' suggests that these concepts have a contemporary, personal relevance for him in addition to any abstract literary interest.

#### **6.4. Personal subject positions in relation to American Literature**

The types of personal concern that students use in their interpretations of texts range from the political commitments to equity described above, to more directly experiential or subjective features of student positions. These personal concerns both motivate students' interpretations and also provide a mechanism for constructing reflexive readings, readings that call into question the language and assumptions that derive from students' social, historical and cultural experiences.

Razia, for example, suggested that her ability to identify with women characters is dependent on the extent to which she shares their emotions and experiences. She compared her experience of reading Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* to her experience of reading Harriet Jacobs' autobiographical narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, suggesting that she found the narrative easier to relate to because it downplayed the violence Jacobs had suffered under slavery. In her narrative, Jacobs describes how her master made advances to her, but does not depict an actual rape. Several students in the North University class questioned how convincing this was, and Razia considers this suggestion:

93. Razia: When I read it, I just took it that he hadn't raped her. But now, speaking about it, and also other texts that I've read about the time we're talking about, not autobiographies, just texts written about slavery, like *Beloved*, it was more prominent. Rape was much more prominent in it. In this one it was more like a personal journey through slavery, and I found it easier to relate to, because sometimes texts about slavery can be really shocking, and even though you sympathise with the people, because what's happened to them is so awful, it's so far removed from what you've experienced yourself. Whereas I found it easier to read her text (the Jacobs). It was just a woman going through life and there were like emotional things involved in it.

(Razia, North University, Slave Narratives)

Razia is here evaluating her own reading practice and the fact that she finds certain texts 'easier to read' than others. She suggests Jacobs' text, which is 'just like a woman going through life', is both easier to read and easier to relate to than the more violent depictions of slavery constructed by contemporary authors, such as Toni Morrison. This observation about her own reading, on one level, validates the reasoning behind the suppression of violence in the slave narratives, which was motivated by a political imperative not to offend or alienate the white American readership of the time. Razia's initial acceptance of Jacobs' account, 'I just took it that he hadn't raped her' might also be read as a confirmation of Morrison's analysis of the need to reconstruct these omissions (Morrison, 1990), since while successfully avoiding giving offence such accounts are perhaps too convincing in down playing the horrors of slavery. At another level, Razia is revealing both how she reads texts through her own experience, and how she is then able to analyse her own reading to relativise her interpretation. She recognises that her identification with elements of Jacobs' experience is a mis-

identification, since, for example the ‘emotional things’, she identified with in her initial reading of Jacobs’ narrative actually mean something quite different for each woman, because of their different relationship to power and freedom:

97. Razia: She does keep reminding us how it’s different for a slave woman, she can’t act in the same way that a white woman will behave, in terms of love and courtship and marriage, she doesn’t have the same choices.

(Razia, North University, Slave Narratives)

Thus, not only does Razia interpret the text through the lens of her experience, but her reading also enables her to re-evaluate the terms and assumptions of her own position.

In the same session, Paul used a similar reference to his own experience in his reading of Douglass’ *Narrative of the Life...* He contrasted literacy practices under slavery, where reading is a rebellious and dangerous act for slaves (Douglass, 2003, p. 2076), to contemporary attitudes to literacy:

36. Peter: Douglass kind of rebelled against it. I mean today, if you went home and told your mum that to celebrate a holiday you were going to do a bit of reading, she’d be impressed by it. But he, when they looked at him reading.

37. Duncan (tutor): It’s seen as very dangerous ...

(East University, Slave Narratives, # 36).

In a similar way to Razia, Peter relates his reading of the narrative to his own experience, and uses the contrast to develop his understanding of both the text and of the context of his own assumptions. Peter’s interpretation is not as explicitly reflexive as Razia’s, but both are articulating the way in which their reading of the set texts, and thus their position within the class, is dependent on specific elements of their personal experience.

Personal experience can contribute to explicitly reflexive interpretations, but it can also simply determine which features of a text a reader prioritises. In his interview, Sevket explained an observation he had made in class about Ismael’s lack of respect when Queequeg is fasting (East University, *Moby Dick* 1, #83) by reference to his own religious practice:



Sevket: Maybe because, initially it's something close to me. I mean, I was fasting myself, and some people would question the point. And when he was trying to fast in the book, Queequeg, and Ismael wouldn't let him, or was trying to stop him, I found it very disrespectful.  
(Sevket, North University, interview)

Here there is a very direct link between Sevket's experience and his selection of issues to foreground in his analysis of the text.

There were also occasions where it might be possible to infer a relationship between black students' experience of racism and their interpretation of the text. As, for example, in Errol and Helen's interpretations of the racial thinking represented in *Moby Dick* in the East University class. Both students are black, and it is possible that their engagement with this section of the class discussion is related to their own experience. Similarly, in the North University discussion of 'Benito Cereno', the two students who were most explicit in identifying racialising traits in Melville's story were both black. However, it also appears from my data that at least one of these students, Josephine, was actively resisting being positioned as taking up a politicised, rather than a more literary stance. She explains her initial response to the story, but refines this response, incorporating points raised in the lecture and class discussion into her interpretation:

24. Josephine: I didn't like it, because, at the end, I just thought, this is another story that stereotypes black people, and the black people did end up having the bad qualities, they did end up as savages. But then, when you said about the shaving scene, it actually seemed to subvert that, because it's saying that Babo was intelligent, and it seemed that Delano didn't credit the fact that they would rebel because he didn't credit the fact that he had any intelligence, so it seems that it's not just stereotypical. (North University, Benito Cereno)

Josephine re-iterated this move away from an over-simplistically politicised interpretation when the tutor, Duncan, returned to her a little later in the session:

27. Duncan: ... But Josephine, you definitely thought that there were just stereotypes that were used in sort of?

28. Josephine: Yes, I did. But now I can see that it was maybe, in a different way it was something about, just the capability of people with the intelligence to be able to fight back.  
(North University, Benito Cereno)

This appears to suggest that while the object and methodology of the discipline allow students to incorporate their experience into their interpretations, the academic context also allows the construction of another, more literary and less politicised, or less racialised, position.

American Literature, then, provides explicit opportunities for students to objectify, relativise and historicize their own responses, experiences and the concepts they use to categorise the world. When combined with the multiple methodological approaches that are legitimate within the discipline, these possibilities for codification of experience, I have suggested, lead to a reduction in 'unthinkable' or 'feminised' positions within the American Literature classroom. This contrasts with the unitary methodological approach of Political Thought, and the prioritisation, within included subject positions, of students able to identify with political or governmental systems. In effect, for the justifications of government that constitute the subject matter of Political Thought to be relevant to students, they have to be able to imagine themselves in a position of government, and as a result the dominant positions within the Political Thought classes correspond to dominant positions within society. The effect of the methodology Political Thought is to narrow down its definitions of concepts – 'justice', 'equality' – which excludes the possible co-existence of alternative interpretations, and also the legitimacy of alternative approaches to the construction of interpretations. In contrast, the relativising and reflexive features of American Literature mean that students are able to use the discipline to denaturalise existing hierarchies and to mediate new subject positions within the classroom.

### **6.5. Institutional similarities: student body, teaching methods and the culture of literary studies**

So far I have not made any distinction between the two institutions, North and East University, in my description of the American Literature classes. The general argument of this chapter, that the multiple methods and approaches used in the American Literature classes produce a wide range of legitimate student positions, provides a partial explanation for the similarities observed in the two groups. There are also some relevant institutional factors which can help to explain these observations. In addition,

there are aspects of the culture of literary studies that can be related to potentially inclusive teaching methods.

The institutional differences between the English departments at North University and East University are not as consistent as those between the Politics departments at West and South Universities. Similar contrasts can be drawn between the universities in relation to previous the educational attainment of students and the reputation and status of the institutions. However the contrast in family and educational background of students in the two Political Thought classes is not replicated in the participating American Literature groups.

The North University English department is highly selective, requiring only slightly lower A level attainment than the West University Politics Department. The East University English department is far less selective, requiring only slightly higher A level attainment than the South University Politics Department<sup>3</sup>. North University is also very similar to West University in its high status and international reputation, and East University is similar to South University in its low status and poor reputation. These features are not unrelated: the criteria for university admissions are dependent on the market and institutions with poor reputations are especially vulnerable to fluctuations in the market. Hannah, the East University American Literature tutor observed, 'we are going through a recruitment crisis at the moment and we get huge amounts of people through on clearing', implying that the expected educational level of entrants to the English degree course was not as high as staff in the department might wish for, even taking into account the access orientation of the university.

The similarities between North and West University do not extend to the social composition of the student body, in relation to which North University is more similar to East and South Universities than to West University. In the West University Political Thought group all of the students had either been privately educated or had at least one parent educated to post-graduate level. In the American Literature class at North University, out of twenty-one students who completed background questionnaires, one had been privately educated and five had parents with post-graduate qualifications. A

further four reported that at least one of their parents either had remained in education to the age of twenty-one or had a degree. The largest group, eight students, reported that their parents had left school at sixteen, or that their parents' highest qualification was O level or CSE. One student had one parent with A level, two students didn't know and one didn't give information about their parents' education. In the North University American Literature group, then, approximately half the students were the first generation of their family to go to university, while this was the case with only one of the twelve students in the West University Political Thought group.

In the East University American Literature class, five of the nine students who attended regularly were mature part-time students. Of these, one had left school after O level and only returned to education much later, to do an Access course. Another reported that she fitted the degree in 'between jobs and life', and that her time at university had been disrupted by several breaks from study. Two of the mature students were non-native speakers of English now living in the UK, one of whom had completed a degree in Iran before coming to this country. The last of the mature students found it very difficult to get time off work to attend the classes, and during the course of my observations missed one session and arrived late to another, as a result, he said, of his inflexible work schedule. Of the four full-time, younger students, two were visiting students from an American University. One of the younger, full-time, UK students reported severe financial difficulties and the other was living at home with her mother, who was also in the middle of a first degree at East University.

Both North and East Universities also explicitly targeted similarly ethnically diverse local communities and this was reflected in the composition of the classes that I observed. In the North University class, eleven out of twenty-one of the students for whom information is available had access to a community language other than English at home. Nine languages other than English were represented. The vast majority, however, had been educated in the UK system. In the East University class, of the nine regular attenders, as I have said two had moved to the UK as adults, from Italy and from Iran. Of the others, two students were black British, one was half Iranian, two were white British and the final two were from the US on a one semester exchange

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<sup>3</sup> Source: the Guardian University Guide, [www.educationGuardian.co.uk/university guide](http://www.educationGuardian.co.uk/university_guide), retrieved

programme. The limitations inherent in my methodology combined with the overall diversity of ethnic background in both groups means that it is not possible to infer any conclusions about the experience of specific ethnic groups. However, this type of ethnic composition might be assumed to be significantly different from a class made up of a majority white UK students or international students from rich industrial countries.

Thus, some of the similarities identified in the student positions available in the American Literature classes may be attributable to the fact that both are composed of a majority of 'non traditional' students: mature students, students with no family experience of higher education and non-white or non-UK educated students. However, in the rest of this section I want to foreground the shared culture of literary studies as a factor in the production of student positions within the American Literature classes. This culture includes some specific assumptions about student reading practices and also about appropriate ways of responding to student interventions.

An underlying assumption within English Literature is that reading is something you do for pleasure<sup>4</sup>. The responses elicited from students when tutors asked general questions about how they felt about a text were often couched in terms of their initial subjective enjoyment or lack of enjoyment: 'I liked it', 'I found the first ten pages boring', 'I found it quite funny in places', 'It's kind of almost like suspenseful'. These subjective responses can be used as a basis for a more developed interpretation, but they also suggest that reading literature can always be assessed in terms of enjoyment, that reading is not purely academic work. Reading for enjoyment is in some ways considered as *the* elementary qualification for studying English. The final concern Hannah raised when she was discussing technical limitations that she had to take into account in her teaching, such as the fact that she couldn't assume high levels of general knowledge in her students, was the far less technical concern that they might not enjoy reading:

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30/5/2002.

<sup>4</sup> Melissa Marsh has quite correctly pointed out that this assumption itself can be exclusionary. Referring to subject choices at sixteen, she suggests that 'enjoying reading' is frequently used as a criterion for entry onto A level English courses. This has a naturalising effect, suggesting that enjoyment of literature is somehow inherent, rather than something that can be taught or acquired. (Melissa Marsh, Academic Literacy seminar, Institute of Education, 15<sup>th</sup> November 2003)

I'm very prejudiced, but they don't seem to read for pleasure (...) I did a degree in English in the first place because I really loved reading books. That's the basic reason why most people do a degree in English. (Hannah, East University, interview)

In fact, although some of the students did find the quantity of reading required for an English Literature degree quite challenging, and several admitted that they could not always complete all of the required reading in time for the classes, they did seem to share Hannah's basic enjoyment of literature. Monica was quite emphatic that literature should be about enjoying the texts that you read:

... just enjoy looking at them and enjoying them. You've got to enjoy the texts or else they won't mean anything to you.

(Monica, East University, interview)

Hamid expressed his enjoyment of literature in a slightly different way. His comment about different types of texts suggests he sees reading as an inherent part of life:

... in your life, when you grow up, you read, basically what you read is novels, fiction, short stories. (Hamid, East University, interview)

His statement that 'when you grow up ... what you read is novels' leaves no room for the possibility of *not* reading.

The assumption that reading should be pleasurable and that this is why students choose literature courses is connected to the fact that reading literary texts is a fundamental, essential, component of all literature courses. There was a clear understanding amongst the tutors and students that in coming to study English they had agreed to spend a lot of their time reading and most students appeared to have read at least a significant amount of the set text, usually a novel, a selection of poems or short stories, or an autobiography, before coming to the classes. Even one of the apparently less diligent students said: 'I always read enough to know what's going on' (David, interview). It was generally felt that at least some knowledge of the set text was necessary to participate fully in class discussions, which inevitably involved direct textual references. Three of the students I interviewed admitted that in some weeks they hadn't even begun the reading, but two of these also implied that when they hadn't done the

reading, it then wasn't worth turning up to the class. This may have been an unnecessary omission on their part, but it demonstrates the extent to which reading the set text is viewed as fundamental within literary studies.

The central role of the set text also can also be related to the teaching methods deployed by the tutors, both of whom designed discussion activities around selected extracts which students read during the sessions. In the North University class, these discussion activities usually took place in small groups of three or four students. In the smaller East University class the tutor often integrated the reading activities and student discussion into her lecture. Students in both groups expressed appreciation of these text-based activities. For some students it was the change in dynamic from whole class to small group that they suggested was helpful. Iris in the North University group, when asked how she felt speaking in classes, said:

I have no problem with it. Usually it's better with the small groups than actually just me talking to the whole group. (Iris, North University, interview)

Other students said that they found the opportunity to focus on a segment of text selected by the tutor particularly useful to help them to identify and discuss ideas:

... because he wouldn't print out a passage that we couldn't read into, because that would be pointless. So obviously, this particular passage, you can contextualise it, and that way people can permeate their ideas. So I think I do prefer at least ten minutes group discussion. (Bashir, North University, interview)

Small group work helps students to generate and experiment with ideas and also provides an opportunity for discussion for students who may not feel so comfortable speaking in front of the whole class. As a result, it inevitably has the effect of producing more positions, more time and more access to ideas, from which students can speak.

Of course small group work is not unique to Literature teaching, nor is it a tool adopted by all literature teachers. Both American Literature tutors described a lack of this type of structure in the teaching they had received at university. Duncan, who put copious amounts of planning into highly structured lectures and discussion tasks, suggested that

he had developed his teaching methods more in reaction against than in mimicry of his own experience as an undergraduate:

I had very little lecturing when I was an undergraduate and most classes started with student presentations, which had all the faults of student presentations. They were badly prepared, they were irrelevant, they were just pointless and stupid and et cetera.

(Duncan, North University tutor, interview)

Thus both his lectures and his seminar teaching are carefully thought out solutions to problematic teaching methods encountered when he was a student. Hannah also reported less structure in the teaching she had experienced as an undergraduate, although she explained the difference in her teaching methods partly as a response to the needs of the students she was teaching:

In some ways what they need is an awful lot more care. They need more guidance and structure, that I certainly didn't get (... ) It's all so much more structured, I mean, when I teach everything's planned. And I just don't even remember there even being something like a course outline on some of the units that I did. You just kind of made it up as you went along. It was more like chats in somebody's room.

(Hannah, East University tutor, interview)

Hannah's experience of teaching as 'more like chats in somebody's room' is not in the same pedagogic tradition as the kind of structured sessions and activities that she provides for her students. When I suggest that the text-based tasks used by both American Literature tutors are connected to a tradition within literary studies, I do not mean a pedagogic tradition but a disciplinary tradition. I think it is plausible to suggest that the centrality of the text and the tradition of close textual analysis within literary studies may help to explain the use of some similar methods and activities in the classes that I observed.

Teaching methods that facilitate the production of multiple legitimate positions from which students can speak can also be associated with the subjective, or interpretive nature of literary studies in general. As I have already suggested, this is a feature of the discipline that is highly valued by literature students (see also Thomas, 1990, ch. 3). The high value attributed to the idea that 'there is no right answer' translates into a



teaching style common to both American Literature tutors: one that avoids rejection or correction of points raised by students in class discussions.

Hannah, the East University tutor, described the interpretative aspect of literary studies in relation to the use of metaphors:

Hannah: I think another thing about metaphors in texts is that they're not necessarily, I mean, the whale might be a metaphor for lots of things, and you to some extent it's my decision, or whoever's decision, of how you're going to read it. It's not a fixed thing. It's a sign. And there are certain things that suggest themselves. Because a metaphor isn't a hard and fast thing anyway. It may be that the same metaphor is a metaphor for lots of different things (...) If you value a work of literature, part of what you value is its complexity and ambiguity...

(Hannah, East University, interview)

Here Hannah re-iterates the idea that ambiguity of meaning in a text or a metaphor is a key feature of literary language and that interpretation of these ambiguities is the decision of the reader. Duncan, the North University tutor, explicitly relates this literary ambiguity to his tendency not to correct students in class discussions:

Duncan: I tend not to say 'no', and I think I probably should (...) In literature, you know, it starts from the assumption that there are these interpretations and that one is not, definitely not that one is not better than another, but that there isn't an ultimate factual grounding for interpretations. Interpretations are inferior or superior on slightly nebulous criteria, or on criteria that can be quite clear but are not matters of fact.

(Duncan, North University tutor, interview)

Duncan is clear that interpretations are not all of equivalent value, but suggests that the criteria for judging the value of interpretations are 'nebulous' or at least 'not matters of fact'. Both tutors, then, have a coherent justification for their avoidance of direct correction, based on the interpretive nature of literary studies.

It is perhaps worth noting that it would be quite possible to read the set texts of the Political Thought classes in a similar way to a traditional 'literary' text. But this would inevitably mean you would be doing literature and not Political Thought. The methodology of Political Thought sets a limit on what counts as a valid interpretation of the set text, and this in turn effects the way the discipline is taught. Cheryl, the West

University lecturer, explicitly identified one of the main roles of the tutor as ensuring that students went away with a 'correct' interpretation:

Cheryl: The role of the teacher is (...) to make sure that when a student says something that is false, he or she stands corrected.

(Cheryl, West University co-ordinator and lecturer, interview)

Both Political Thought tutors' interventions in the Political Thought sessions conform to this model of the tutor's role. Students in the Political Thought classes also frequently correct and contradict each other, both on points of textual interpretation and during more general discussion. In the American Literature classes students rarely contradict or correct each other, and the tutors' responses to dubious points raised by students are less direct than the Political Thought tutors'. Duncan responded to a student contribution that he later described as 'questionable' by asking the student a series of questions: 'What sort of double meanings?', 'Do the characters know what they're saying?', 'Do you think Huck knows what he's saying all the time?' and finally, 'Interesting point. I don't know', before moving on to a slightly different point. In the interview he described this approach as:

... maybe my way of finessing it and avoiding saying to the student, 'I think that's rubbish'.

(Duncan, North University tutor, interview)

Hannah, too, responded to dubious interpretations offered by students by asking questions or attempting to reformulate the student's point into something more coherent. She only corrected students on factual or historical points, which constitute a comparatively minor part of the class discussions. Again, then, features inherent to the discipline have a direct effect on teaching methods and classroom culture, and on the extent to which student interventions are constructed as legitimate or illegitimate as interpretations of the material being discussed in the classroom.

## 6.6. Gendered student positions in the American Literature classes<sup>5</sup>

In my analysis of the Political Thought classes, I identified two gendered aspects to interventions in the discussions. The first was related to the disciplinary methodology that requires participants to explore their understanding of concepts unmediated by empirical data or textual evidence. This mode of analysis, I suggested, requires students to take up a 'masculine' position in relation to language, one that is identified with a dominant position from which the terms of the language can be defined. The second gendered aspect of interventions was social. I suggested that female students had to conform to codes of gender behaviour that were frequently in conflict with the criteria for a successful academic performance within the classroom. The analysis presented in this chapter so far suggests that, in relation to disciplinary methodology and mode of interaction, the American Literature classes do not share the highly masculine features of the Political Thought classes. The multiple approaches, combined with the central role attributed to the text, produce a more varied and mediated set of possible relationships between students and legitimate disciplinary claims. However, the gendered features of social interaction in American Literature classes are not dissimilar to those I described in the previous chapter. For example, Rose's claim, cited earlier in this chapter, that she has no problem speaking in class, although 'it's usually better in small groups', is very similar to Charlotte's uncertain and empirically inconsistent claim, discussed in the previous chapter, that, 'I think I knew that if I wanted to say something I wouldn't have a problem with it'. Rose's claim is similarly empirically unfounded, since during my observations she contributed to class discussions on only one occasion, when directly invited to do so.

The accounts given by the American Literature students were, then, consistent with the analysis in the previous chapter. The reason why it is important to re-iterate apparently

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<sup>5</sup> In the North University American Literature class, my impression was that male students contributed more, but this impression wasn't as clear cut as for the other classes. When I counted, both my general impression and my sense of uncertainty were confirmed. In three out of four of the sessions, contributions from male students did out number contributions from female students (Moby Dick, f = 20, m = 29; Slave Narratives, f = 20, m = 40; Huckleberry Finn, f = 10, m = 29), however in the session on Benito Cereno, a class where fewer students than usual were present, the female students contributed more than the male students (f = 33, m = 23). As I have suggested, without more detailed analysis, these numbers merely

similar material about gendered modes of classroom participation is precisely to emphasise the way that gendered codes provide a more generalisable context within which the more localised fields of disciplinary specialisms on undergraduate courses are positioned.

Having discussed non-participative female students in the previous chapter, here I am going to focus on some of the female students who participated most frequently. These female students took up a feminised position within the classes when they intervened to facilitate discussion or to alleviate uncomfortable situations.

Monica, a student in the East University American Literature class, was very active in class discussion, despite only joining the class in the third week of the course. The first session she attended was the second class on *Moby Dick*. Although she had not read the text, she took an active role throughout. In the following extract, Edward has been speaking for some time. The point he is making is rather obscure and difficult to follow and Hannah, the tutor has already attempted to intervene. Here she attempts to intervene for a second time and Monica follows up Hannah's intervention by offering a suggestion that attempts to make sense of what Edward has been saying:

228. Edward: I mean, at the end of the day, here we have a situation where we've historically got this communication system, we know where we are, in America they don't have that, and somebody like Melville is trying to identify with their new concept of who they are...

229. Hannah (tutor): I think this is really, I don't know, you're bringing in too many different things that I can't keep a lid on.

230. Monica: (to Edward) Are you saying to look at things in their historical context, look at what was going on at the time?

(East University, *Moby Dick* 2)

In her interview, Monica explained her intervention:

Monica: I didn't understand anything he said, but I just thought, because he was talking about the communication system, I just thought he was trying to put everything into a historical context that I don't really think he knew enough about (...) I was trying to save him. I felt really

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give a very general impression that female students did contribute, and that, in general, male students contributed slightly more.

bad, you know, he said it and everyone was like. I thought, okay, you're putting it in historical context, yes, of course you are.

(Monica, East University, interview)

This explanation reveals that the purpose of her intervention was absolutely related to Monica's desire to manage the social situation, and not at all related to her own learning or academic expression. Although her suggestion that Edward may be attempting 'to look at things in their historical context' sounds reasonable, it was not in fact an attempt to reconstruct what he was saying, since, she 'didn't understand anything he said.' The more convincing explanation of her intervention, is, as she says, that she was 'trying to save him.' This attempt to support another student might almost be interpreted as a maternal position. Monica's final comment, 'I thought, okay, you're putting it in historical context, yes, of course you are', expressly ignores Edward's real meaning and offers a solution, in a way that infantilises Edward and puts Monica into a mothering position.

In the North University class, Ambia takes up a similar position in relation to the tutor. She describes her response to uncomfortable silences in the American Literature classes:

Ambia: I think some of the stuff people say in class is brilliant, but when it comes down to the fact that no one's read the book, or everyone's found the book difficult, or no one's been able to think about the book in depth, then we come across problems, and it's just an hour of Duncan trying to cajole people into saying something. The worst thing is I always feel like I should say something, so I'm always like clutching at straws, just so that the conversation gets started.

(Ambia, North University, interview)

There was evidence of her intervening as she has described, 'clutching at straws, just so that the conversation gets started', filling the awkward silences after the tutor has asked a question, on several occasions during my observations. It is perhaps also worth noting that I was surprised by her perceptive comments about set texts during our interview, as I had noticed that her comments in class were sometimes rather trivial. As with Monica's intervention to 'save' Edward, Ambia is prioritising a supportive, feminine performance over a concern to demonstrate her own academic abilities.

A comparison with a student occupying a more masculine position will help to clarify the feminised nature of the position I am describing. David was also a student in the North University American Literature class. When I arranged to interview him, he hadn't yet contributed in the classes, but he did contribute in later sessions, and in the interview he presented himself as generally quite active in class discussions. We spent some time during the interview discussing his mode of participation in classes:

David: Sometimes I've felt bad that I haven't said anything, because I have an idea and I think maybe it's not quite right, maybe I shouldn't say anything. And then someone else says something similar and I think, I should have said that. And other times, there was one time Duncan said, I'd been thinking things all through the lesson but hadn't said anything, and then he actually asked me something, and then I didn't have any thoughts, so I was like, 'no, um', and it looked really bad.

(David, North University, interview)

Ambia and David provide similar accounts of the discomfort of sitting in class when no one is responding to the tutor's question. However, their responses to this situation are strikingly different. For Ambia, the need to contribute to the management of the class overrides her concern or embarrassment about making trivial points. For David, according to his account, his doubts about the value of what he is thinking stop him from articulating his ideas. David described another class, where, in a similar type of uncomfortable situation, he had intervened. His intervention, as he describes it, contrasts with Ambia's, because instead of risking saying something that might appear trivial, but that is still related to the subject, David introduces a slightly unrelated topic, in order, he suggests, to bring an end to an awkward silence:

David: (...) In Nineteenth Century Novels I'd often go into pornography quite a lot, in terms of the books, because a lot of them are quite sexual. Our seminar leader, she was quite a, she was really dry, quite serious, quite humourless, as such, to look at her. She was quite difficult to talk to on a personal level. She always looked at the floor, she seemed strange. She dressed like a nun. She was very bland (...) She'd ask questions in a seminar and nobody would say anything, and I would pipe up talking about how I felt this was like pornography and give a modern example of something. And she, it would lighten the atmosphere, everyone would have fun talking about that. I think people might have got annoyed by me in the class, because they wanted to do something more serious, but, you know, you could have fun with that. You could go off topic, but at the same time you did talk about the book.

(David, North University, interview)

Not knowing the tutor being described here, and not having observed the sessions, it is difficult to interpret the precision of this account. However, according to David, his strategy was successful in managing to 'lighten the atmosphere'. His references to pornography during the classes, as a way of teasing, engaging with, and/or, possibly insulting the tutor, is a highly gendered, sexualised strategy. In contrast to Ambia, who intervenes to maintain the general class discussion, David does not appear concerned by his recognition that 'people might have got annoyed with me in the class, because they wanted to do something more serious'. David's intervention relieves the discomfort of the classroom silence, but, it would appear, prioritises his relationship with the tutor over the lesson as a whole. The prioritisation of this relationship in his evaluation of his performance is suggested in a comment he made earlier in the interview, where he describes his participation in the Nineteenth Century Novels class in terms of his interaction with the tutor.

David: (...) I remember, Nineteenth Century Novels in the first year. My seminar group was a very quiet one, and I think I was one of the few people who said anything in that class. And I always started it off, and I was always engaged in some argument or hot debate with our seminar leader.

(David, North University, interview)

David's prioritisation of his relationship with his (female) tutor constitutes a more positive version of the way Michael and Edward (discussed in ch. 4) both foreground perceived weaknesses in their tutors arguments in order to enhance their own positions. Similarly, David's explicit presentation of himself as a student capable of active participation and engagement in seminars was replicated in other interviews with male students. This desire to be seen as someone capable of performing and of expressing their ideas is evident in Hamid's response when I asked him if he found it easy or difficult to make contributions in the classes:

Hamid: Most of the time, whatever I think that this is right, in my opinion, so I say this. I'm not kind of ashamed or embarrassed, just to be silent. Have you noticed that? I say whatever I think.

(Hamid, East University, interview)

What is signified in these differences between male and female students is the different gendered performances that students are required to produce. The discourses of masculinity, which structure the performance of (mostly) male students, prioritise the ability to identify with powerful ideas and individuals. The discourses of femininity, in contrast, prioritise the role of supporting pre-existing structures of power. This support can be enacted through the acquiescent performances of non-vocal students, or through the active mediation of social relations within the classroom. Female students who don't make use of these highly feminised modes of participation in class discussions often appear either slightly nervous or slightly over-assertive when intervening to make a point.

### **6.7. The gendered positioning of the teacher/academic**

There are significant differences in the ways in which the American Literature tutors both conceptualise the boundaries of the discipline and construct their positions as academic/tutor. Hannah does not construct a very definite boundary between the discipline of American Literature and the personal and political experiences of the students. She also varies her position in classroom interactions, moving from the highly academic to the more personal, and at times takes a relatively light hearted, un-academic approach to what is being said in the sessions. Duncan, in contrast, has a very explicit conception of the boundary between the academic and the personal and maintains a very strict academic position throughout the sessions. When he makes a joke, it is an academic joke that he signposts for the students by saying: 'that was a joke'. These differences are consistent with the definition of the masculine position situated in identification with, and the feminine position as on the outside of dominant, in this case academic, discourses.

Hannah's explanation of the purpose of the classes foregrounds the overlap between issues raised in the literature and issues relevant to students' lives:

I think that class contact is for getting people to engage with the subject on their own terms, so that they are actively interested in it rather than having this rather mechanical attitude towards it (...) I don't think it necessarily matters if you're teaching the nineteenth century American novel. I don't think the issues that it deals with should necessarily be seen as that separate to the world in which the student is living. I think it has to be related to the students' experience. And I



think that if you want someone to really engage with something you have to make it relevant to them.

(Hannah, East University tutor, interview)

The purpose of the sessions, she suggests, is to excite students' interest in the subject, and to do this she thinks it is important to demonstrate how the texts are relevant to the students: 'it has to be related to the students' experience'. An example of one of the ways in which Hannah relates textual issues to students' experience came in a discussion of 'race' and gender in *Moby Dick*. Here, Hannah is trying to elicit the broader metaphorical implications of the relationship between Queequeg and Ismael at the beginning of the novel. She is trying to get to the idea that Ismael's feminised position in his relationship with Queequeg can be related to a broader critique of white power within the novel: that there is a strong identification between the feminine position and the position of the non-white as the weaker partner in relation to white masculinity, and that Ismael's position subverts this identification. They have just discussed the reference made in the novel to Queequeg and Ismael sharing a bed and participating in a 'marriage' ceremony:

96. Hannah (tutor): So what is this about? What is this image of Ismael and Queequeg as husband and wife? What's that about? I mean this implicit thing (...) What's it there for? Is it just a joke? Do you think there's any relationship between what might be going on in terms of ideas about race and how Ismael deals with this savage and issues about gender and how Ismael identifies himself as a man? Do you think they're related? Issues of racial identity and issues of gender identity? Why do you think they're there? Sorry, is that a bemusing concept?
97. Hamid: It's two now, racial identity and then gender identity.
98. Hannah: Well do you think they're related? Do you think of who you are in terms of what gender you are is at all bound up with how you define yourself in terms of your sexuality? Is that at all inter-related with racial identity?
99. Errol: Well, It's your first and second point of identification, race and then gender, black male, white female.
100. Hannah: I think gender comes first for me. I think I would always think of somebody first in terms of gender before anything else.
101. Errol: I suppose I was looking at it from the other side of the fence. I mean, not from a personal point of view, because I always think of myself as male first (laughter) – and I've seen myself naked, so I know – but from a descriptive point of view, if you describe anybody you always describe their race first and then their gender.
102. Hannah: Yes, it's true. Even though that's not how you describe yourself.

103. Errol: That's not how you perceive yourself, but you always perceive somebody else in that light.
104. Paola: But Ismael is Queequeg's wife.
- (East University, Moby Dick 1)

Hannah moves from initial general questions about the relationship between 'race' and gender (96) to the complex personal question 'Do you think who you are in terms of what gender you are is at all bound up with how you define yourself in terms of sexuality? Is that at all inter-related with racial identity?' (98). Errol's response (101), considering how he would describe himself, does not immediately appear relevant to the issues she wants to raise in relation to the text. However, the distinction he draws in his conclusion (103) between what is foregrounded when we think about ourselves and what is foregrounded in other people's perceptions of us, is pertinent to the issues raised in the novel in relation to racial thinking<sup>6</sup>. Paola's intervention (104) then brings the more personal section of discussion back to the text, and a little while later Hannah is able to develop her argument to a conclusion.

When she explained how she felt about this extract, Hannah suggested that it had raised interesting issues that were not directly related to the novel, but which she would have liked to follow up:

That conversation left me, I thought it was quite problematic because I wondered whether the fact that I think of myself primarily as a female rather than primarily as white is to do with issues of race, you know. I don't have to think about my whiteness because it's the invisible colour, whereas if I was black I'd have to think about it. And maybe we should have had a discussion about that, because I did feel at the time that it was quite unsatisfactory. But I didn't want to, I suppose I didn't want it to go off at a tangent.

(Hannah, East University tutor, interview)

Although her sense of a boundary meant that she 'didn't want it to go off at a tangent', it is clear that Hannah felt that the issues raised in this extract were legitimate material for academic discussion. This is consistent with her later comment that she sees the introduction of personal issues into academic discussions as both obvious and useful:

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<sup>6</sup> As a piece of grammatical analysis, however, Errol's interpretation of adjective order is inaccurate: the most fundamental characteristic is always closest to the noun, so 'black male student' actually prioritises gender over 'race'. I don't think this necessarily undermines the final point Errol makes here.

I don't think it's difficult to talk about personal issues. I mean, obviously everybody in the room has a gender and a colour, but I don't think it means you can't talk about them, and I think that very often you can have good seminars in which people talk about themselves in that kind of way.

(Hannah, East University tutor, interview)

Duncan's feelings about the introduction of the personal into his teaching sessions are very different. In the interview, we discussed the extract from the session on slave narratives where Razia talked about the way she responds to different representations of women's lives. Duncan's evaluation of the extract was slightly negative:

Towards the end of the extract it becomes a bit un-textually grounded, not un-textually grounded, but the level of analysis is quite sort of shallow, perhaps, or basic, 'I found this really shocking', 'it was how I related to it as a sort of person in my contemporary space' – all that stuff that's sort of quite A levelly. But I think, I don't mind that happening occasionally in classes, because I think those are the ways you respond to a text and you do have to acknowledge that (...) I do want to sort of push those buttons in people. I wouldn't want this sort of thing to appear in a student's essay<sup>7</sup>, but there is a place for that in class. (Duncan, North University tutor, interview)

While he acknowledges that 'there is a place for that in class', Duncan suggests that Razia's reference to her personal experience is 'shallow', 'basic', and 'quite A levelly'. He is constructing a clear distinction between legitimate and illegitimate modes of analysis, and explicit reference to the personal appears, for him, to be illegitimate.

The section of discussion when Razia was speaking was notable within the session on Slave Narratives. Before that moment, the class had focussed on Frederick Douglass' text, and the participants had mostly been male students. Duncan then asked the

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<sup>7</sup> This can be contrasted with Hannah's response when a student did precisely this. In his essay - an analysis of how Equiano's understanding of his own position as a slave was confused by historical differences between European and African slave traders - Errol put in a personal observation:

When I first read this book some years ago, I was astonished to learn that slavery was a commonplace way of life in Africa.  
(Errol, essay on Slave Narratives)

Hannah commented in the margin:

Your surprise (and it's clearly not an uncommon response) is itself interesting.

students to think about the text by Harriet Jacobs, and it was during this section of class that two female students contributed and became the main participants in the discussion for several minutes. Duncan acknowledged that this was a striking moment in the class but it is not clear whether it is something he values or something he feels is, or should be, slightly marginal:

When Razia started speaking it was very obvious at the time that this was a moment when women in the room were being engaged as women. And Razia does sort of thematise that, perhaps without saying it explicitly, but you can tell from the tenor of her comments, she says, I was thinking about this as a woman, reading other books by women about women's experience.  
(Duncan, North University tutor, interview)

In a later meeting, Duncan explained his discomfort with the fact that female students sometimes seem to be engaging with a text 'as women', saying that he would prefer everyone to engage with texts at the same level, i.e. an academic level, which, for Duncan, appears to be distinct from the personal, gendered engagement. This desire for all students to engage with texts in the same way, while unrealistic, is a justifiable stance to take as a teacher, and although Duncan seemed particularly aware of the moments when female students foreground their gender, he appeared equally ambiguous about the suggestion that students' contributions in class might be related to other aspects of their personal experience. He acknowledged that contributions from students from the US were sometimes attributed a distinctive status within the American Literature classes, but did not think it relevant to consider the religion of a student who questioned references to religion in a text.

This contrast between the tutors affects their positioning in relation to a certain conception of what it means to be academic. Duncan's seriousness during the classes, his discomfort with what he sees as un-academic contributions from students and his consistent use of a precise and formal academic language, constitute a strong identification between him and a formal conception of academic modes of thinking. Hannah, in contrast, explicitly distances herself from this position through the use of informal language, through the interjection of offhand comments during the seminars and through references to personal issues. This difference in their relation to a formally

objective academic position is exemplified in the different types of light-hearted comments each makes in class. Duncan's asides were always academically grounded. The joke I have already referred to was based on a section of discussion in the session on *Huckleberry Finn*. The class had been discussing Twain's criticism of Emerson's literary style, and how this appeared contradictory in the light of Twain's other claim that he was only interested in telling a good story. Duncan commented:

Duncan: Yes (...) Emerson can say, 'why are you worried about the inconsistencies in my argument, there wasn't meant to be one.' And it would undercut any sort of academic criticism you might want to make. Which is why we should reject them, obviously. (pause) That was a joke.

(North University, *Huckleberry Finn*)

I am not sure whether the suggestion is that we should reject academic criticism or that we should reject authors' attempts to deny any serious point in their work, but either way, the joke is that Duncan is following his argument to an extreme in suggesting that either position should be rejected outright by students of literature. On another occasion Duncan interjected his enthusiasm when it became apparent that students' felt that the suspense in Melville's 'Benito Cereno' was effective:

Duncan: (...) We come in *in media res*, when Delano does, and we don't know the sort of context of this whole story. So that is a way of getting at a certain effect, of making a certain theoretical point, that couldn't be achieved in any other way, perhaps. I'm really glad that sort of – go Melville! – the suspense works (...)

(North University, *Benito Cereno*)

Duncan's enthusiastic outburst, 'go Melville!', is entirely grounded in the literature.

These examples can be contrasted with a moment in the East University session on *Moby Dick*. Hannah had spent some time eliciting ideas about the novel's use of the ocean as a metaphor for American expansionism. Nevertheless, while Errol is explaining the implications of the contrast between expansion on the land and expansion on the sea, Hannah interjects a point that is, as Duncan would say, totally untextually grounded:

183. Errol: (...) there's no way of taming it, no closure, because there's no way you can stick a fence round it. There's no way you can, you know, herd all these whales into one little corral and get them to breed and...
184. Hannah (tutor): Well you can do that with killer whales, can't you? They can jump through hoops. Sorry, yes.
- (East University, Moby Dick 1)

Despite the fact that Errol is articulating precisely the point she has been trying to develop, Hannah allows herself to be distracted, for a moment, from her role as class tutor and academic.

These examples typify the tutors' different feelings about relinquishing their academic position in their classes. Duncan expressed concern about an incident where he hadn't remembered a detail about a text during a seminar, saying, 'what I remember about that was not being quite in control'. In contrast, Hannah is less concerned about such losses of control, saying, 'I admit to not knowing things all the time.' It would be possible to suggest that both in her academic interests and in her interaction as a teacher, Hannah values the personal and is relatively comfortable relinquishing control, while Duncan is sceptical of the value of the personal in academic work and is uncomfortable relinquishing control. However, an analysis more in line with a Lacanian conception of the feminine can provide a less individualistic account. It is possible to align the ability to identify fully with academic discourse with the masculine ability to express sexual desire. Just as Lacan's female patients have to deny knowledge of their own *jouissance* in order to maintain their gender position, so, perhaps, female academics have to disguise their own seriousness in their intellectual pursuits. Academic work, like sex, within this conceptual framework can be described as the embodiment of the masculine position, not of course because women are inherently less capable of, or derive less pleasure from either activity, but because conformity with socially imperative codes of femininity requires the repression of such pleasures.

## 6.8. The effects of gendered academic positions on student participation

As I hope I have already shown in other sections of my analysis, it is not possible to predict student reactions to different teaching styles. Certain teaching orthodoxies might maintain that Hannah's less academic style is necessarily less intimidating, and therefore less exclusionary than Duncan's academic seriousness. However, as Edward's experience in Hannah's class demonstrates (see ch. 3), the legitimacy afforded to discussion of personal experience, especially in relation to issues of gender and ethnicity, can act to marginalize rather than to include some students. Further, Hannah's relaxed and occasionally unserious style may well have contributed to Edward's avowed lack of confidence in her position as an academic. Edward is clearly an extreme case, but it may be more generally true that some university students want a distinctively academic experience, and that therefore supposedly 'intimidating' academic language presented by someone who refuses to 'come down' to their level may be a part of what they have signed up for.

I am not, then, suggesting that either of these gendered modes of interaction within academic discourse constitutes a necessarily more or less exclusionary teaching style. The important point is that both constitute boundaries that will affect different groups of students in different ways. Just as Hannah's feminised mode of interaction can be seen to have contributed to Edward's marginalisation, Duncan's more masculine, academic style also had an effect on classroom interaction.

The strict boundary that Duncan constructed around what counts as legitimate classroom discussion elicited a variety of responses to his teaching. As I have suggested, his planning of lectures and seminars was extremely rigorous and highly structured. His demeanour in the classes was also extremely focussed and several students were emphatically appreciative of this rigour:

Rajpal: I think his lecturing style is pretty good and I can see a continuity between each of the lectures that he does (...) I don't think that other courses I'm doing come close in terms of, like, the coherence of the course.

(Rajpal, North University, interview)

Sevket: I do enjoy these classes. I think that Duncan's lectures are brilliant. I think he goes into a lot of detail and you can tell that he puts the hard work in (...) He is structurally very clear. There is a lot of detail. He doesn't seem to leave many gaps, and the comprehension is there: I always seem to understand what he's saying and what he means. There's not much I can fault him on. I really enjoy his lectures.

(Sevket, North University, interview)

However, two of the other students I interviewed explicitly commented that Duncan's style could be intimidating:

Ambia: Other people can entice you into talking just by, you know, saying some general stuff before ploughing into the work, whereas Duncan, he's very passionate about what he does but I think with that he's sort of, you don't get relaxed with him. (...) Sometimes lecturers might say something very general and then, something that happened in the week to them, and then bring you into the seminar like that. I think that works well, because apart from getting to know about the book, you get to know a little bit about your seminar leader as well, and you can relate to that, and then I think that puts everyone at their ease (...) I think Duncan's a very bright man, you can tell, and I think people do find that a bit intimidating.

(Ambia, North University, interview)

David: Duncan's a nice guy, but he comes across as being quite serious. There are fun times, but he doesn't come across as the kind of guy that you can mess around with and make a few offhand comments.

(David, North University, interview)

Both of these students also referred to a specific incident that had occurred at the beginning of the course, before I had started observing the sessions. Apparently, a student had made a flippant remark about not being able to afford to buy the set texts and Duncan had taken the comment seriously, and had responded quite severely. Both students suggested that this incident might have inhibited students from participating in later classes. Indeed, in the preparatory discussions before I went in to observe the classes, Duncan had mentioned that he found this class quite awkward and unresponsive. Both he and several students also commented that after I had started my observations participation in class discussions had increased. Since I hadn't seen the class before, I wasn't able to assess this for myself, and although the class didn't appear strikingly unresponsive in comparison to other classes I have taught or observed, it also



never appeared to me that the group was particularly relaxed. If, as appears plausible from Ambia and David's accounts, students were inhibited from participating following the incident at the beginning of the term, then it also seems plausible to suggest that there is a relationship between these marginalizing effects and Duncan's generally serious approach to his academic work and his strong identification with the position of academic.

## **6.9. Conclusions**

The evidence of this chapter appears to demonstrate that American Literature's combination of a variety of interpretive methodologies produces a multiplicity of legitimate student positions within undergraduate classes. The explicit engagement with issues of class, gender and racial thinking in addition to more literary or linguistic aspects of texts, provides a legitimate academic context in which students can explore a range of literary, political and more personal concerns. Further, the specifically relativising or reflexive nature of some of the modes of interpretation available within the discipline constitutes a critical mode of engagement with existing social relations: mediated through the literature class, the set texts enable students to identify and question initial responses and linguistic assumptions that are derived from their own cultural context and experience.

The evidence presented here further suggests that the gendered structuring of classroom interaction crosses disciplinary divides. Just as male students and tutors can be seen to resist the feminine position, and to make positive efforts to align themselves with dominant discourses and individuals within the classroom, so female students and tutors actively resist too close an alignment with dominant discourses, which would require them to suppress feminising performances. As I have suggested the Lacanian framework helps us to understand these gendered responses to discursive contradictions by foregrounding the position of gender as a first signifier of subjectivity. However, in the American Literature classes, the re-iteration of hegemonic masculine and feminine positions constituted in these gendered performances does not overlap with the issues and methodologies of the discipline, and as such, the participation of female students appears to be less problematic and contradictory than in the Political Thought classes.

This analysis, then, constitutes two different developments of Bernstein's category of horizontal knowledge structures. Firstly, it suggests that segmentally structured disciplines do not necessarily foreground one language or approach in the interest of a specific social group, and, following from this, that they are not necessarily exclusionary in the way that Bernstein has described. This finding is not inconsistent with Bernstein's model, but merely represents a refinement developed in response to the examination of empirical examples. Secondly, the analysis of both Political Thought and American Literature as partially constituted in relation to gendered discursive practices identifies an aspect of the internal structure of disciplinary knowledge that is not accounted for in Bernstein's model. While Bernstein's overall framework presents a relational picture of knowledge, his models of horizontal and hierarchical knowledge structures do not offer a very sophisticated account of the different ways in which disciplines interact with substantive features of the social context. The analysis presented here reveals how social, and specifically gendered features can both be identified in the substantive content and can also be associated with the methodology and mode of engagement of the disciplines.

Finally, it is worth noting that, while American Literature's explicitly critical content, its multiple methodologies, and its open interpretive possibilities do mean that it can be described as a more inclusive discipline than Political Thought, these features should not give rise to an over-idealistic account of American Literature as an 'inclusive' discipline. As has already been demonstrated in the analysis of marginalized students in chapter three, there are some aspects of the disciplinary object and methods of American Literature that can act to marginalize certain students. All disciplines are necessarily constructed within boundaries, and, arguably, it is the students on the margins who constitute these boundaries within each specific classroom context.

## **CONCLUSION: A RELATIONAL CONCEPTION OF STUDENT POSITIONS**

### **7.1. The product of the research: a structure for the sociological description of gender and disciplines**

In so far as I began this research with a set of hypotheses about the social positioning and effects of academic disciplines within higher education classrooms, it could be argued that these hypotheses have been confirmed. However, I find it more accurate to describe the product of the research as a set of descriptions that elaborate the theoretical frameworks that I have drawn on from within social theory and sociology. These descriptions do not act to either confirm or rebut initial hypotheses, but rather offer a new way of viewing students' relations to the discursive practices of both gender and discipline within the institutional settings of higher education.

What the research provides, then, is an innovative structure for the sociological description of gender and disciplines. The Lacanian framework, conceptualising gender as a position in relation to language and the symbolic order, enables a connection to be made between the substantive content and methodologies of academic disciplines and students' identifications with gendered positions within the classroom. There are three distinct stages in the production of this framework. In the first, it is necessary to provide a description of the object and methodologies of academic disciplines. The second stage is to identify gendered aspects of students' and tutors' participation in the classes: participation that conforms or fails to conform to the recognised, legitimate codes of the academic setting. The third stage is to identify where there is a correlation between gendered modes of participation in the classroom and specific features of disciplinary methodologies. It is in this stage that a connection can be made, for example, between the masculine position, student participation, and the methodology of Political Thought.

This final level of analysis constitutes a distinctive description of the relationship between gender and academic disciplines.

The analysis, then, has two key implications. The theoretical implication is that it is possible to make a connection between the methodologies and objects of academic disciplines and gendered positions in relation to language, knowledge and social interaction. The methodological implication is that sociological claims about the internal structure of disciplinary knowledge must be based on a detailed analysis of disciplinary languages produced within specific contexts. Further, this study also demonstrates that a sociological understanding of academic knowledge must always position fields of disciplinary knowledge within the other overdetermining social fields that constitute the boundaries of disciplinary identities.

Here I want to summarise the ways in which the thesis suggests that it is possible to view student positioning in undergraduate classrooms as a relational effect of the interaction between the relatively autonomous discursive fields of institution, discipline and gender.

## **7.2. The social positioning of academic disciplines.**

The description of the methodologies of Political Thought and American Literature as prioritising respectively metonymic and metaphoric reasoning processes forms the basis for my elaboration of Bourdieu's analysis of the position of different disciplines in relation to temporally dominant social hierarchies. Bourdieu's analysis of academics in a range of disciplines has already revealed the relationship between social class, discipline choice and the position of the discipline in relation to dominant social structures, with proportionately more academics from the dominant classes working in academic fields with a close relationship to dominant positions within the establishment. The research presented here has elaborated ways in which the internal structure of knowledge, constituted in the relationship between the object and methodologies of the disciplines, can also be related to the social divisions that Bourdieu has observed.

The analysis in chapters four and five revealed how the metonymic structure of legitimate claims within Political Thought tends to exclude more interpretive modes of analysis. In addition, these narrow chains of reasoning can be associated with a combative style of interaction, within which different arguments are seen as necessarily in opposition to each other, rather than as useful alternative possible interpretations. This style of interaction is exacerbated by the fact that the object of study in Political Thought classes tends to be the argument itself, rather than an external empirical object, and thus students are required to articulate their ideas and opinions directly, rather than being able to offer their views mediated through the interpretation of a source text. These features of the discipline, I have argued, can be associated both with the position of the discipline as applied knowledge in the service of government and with a dominant, masculine position in relation to language and the symbolic order. These features of the substantive content combined with the dominant methodology and mode of interaction of the Political Thought classes constitute an elaboration of Bourdieu's account of the social positioning of the discipline.

The description of the metaphoric structure of reasoning within American Literature and the way in which this permits multiple interpretive possibilities, which are not conceptualised as necessarily in opposition to each other, constitutes a similar elaboration of Bourdieu's account of the social positioning of academic disciplines. The more open, interpretive style of interaction in American Literature classes, combined with the discipline's adoption of multiple methodological approaches, constitutes a wide variety of different possible modes through which students can identify with the discipline. This description of the multiple interpretive approaches of American Literature, combined with an understanding of its explicit incorporation of issues of class, gender and racial thinking, and its critical descriptive position in relation to social hierarchies, constitutes an account of the social position of the discipline that contrasts with Political Thought's narrower methodology and far closer identification with the masculine codes of the establishment.

These detailed descriptions of features of the disciplines as enacted in the classrooms suggest that in order to take up a successful position within the classroom students are required to identify with subject matter, methodologies and modes of participation that

occupy specific social positions and that have correlative social effects. The extent to which they are able to do this is at least in part dependent on other factors constituting the social position of individual students. Thus the positioning of students within the classroom is a product of the interaction between their own social position and the social position of the discipline.

However, a distinction must be maintained between different features of the social positioning of academic disciplines. It is possible to make some general claims about the connection between the social functions of knowledge and student in/exclusion. However, the specific associations described here between the social functions of Political Thought and American Literature and the internal structure and methodologies of these two disciplines cannot be generalised to other disciplines with similar social functions. Thus, descriptive or critical disciplines such as the natural sciences cannot be assumed to have a similar structure to Literary Studies, and other temporally dominant disciplines, such as Law and Medicine, may not share methodological features with Political Thought. The specific ways in which the methodologies of these disciplines constitute modes of interaction within social settings is an empirical question that requires separate investigation.

### **7.3. Moving beyond Bernstein's pedagogic codes**

As has been seen, Bernstein's work on the concept of pedagogic codes provides innovative insights into the relationship between forms of knowledge and social organisations. His conceptualisation of the structure of academic disciplines as either hierarchically or horizontally organised, and of the way such organisation might influence the transmission of disciplinary knowledge within the classroom, foregrounds an important object of study for the sociology of knowledge. However, his specific criteria for identifying horizontal knowledge structures are not adequate to account for the differences between Political Thought and American Literature, and his theorisation of the possible effects of horizontal knowledge structures in educational settings does not account for the examples described in this study.

There are two implications of this finding. The first is the need for detailed empirical work to form the basis of any sociology of disciplinary knowledge. Although, as Bernstein's work demonstrates, it is possible to develop useful models on the basis of a general knowledge of academic disciplines, concrete statements about the actual nature and effect of disciplinary knowledge require a closer examination of contextualised instances of disciplinary statements. Such empirical analysis will also help to ensure that the role of any one aspect of the social positioning of academic disciplines is not attributed disproportionate significance in the analysis of educational settings. Bernstein himself does not ever suggest that the analysis of pedagogic codes alone can provide an adequate description of the social. However, some instances of the taking up of his work (Moore and Muller, 1999, Maton, 2000, Arnot, 2002) suggest interpretations of the social that overplay the autonomy, and therefore the predictive capabilities, of Bernstein's models and that do not take sufficient account of other discursive factors in their analysis of the development and effects of disciplinary knowledge structures. Thus the second implication of this study, in relation to Bernstein's pedagogic codes, is that the formulation of such codes constitutes an overly structural account of knowledge, and ultimately of the social. The emptying of descriptions of knowledge of any substantive content or object removes an essential tool for understanding how knowledge constitutes and is constituted within an existing social order.

By identifying the overlap between aspects of the identities of different discursive practices – the overlap between, for example, Political Thought, elite higher education institutions, and masculinity – this study has argued both for the impossibility of producing discrete descriptions of social objects, and also for the importance of developing an understanding of academic disciplines as embedded within other socially positioned discursive fields.

#### **7.4. Methodological limitations on the analysis of gender and ethnicity**

There are, of course, many limitations in the analysis presented here. The foregrounding of discipline, gender and institution as key reference points in the analysis means that the influence of other factors, teaching style, for example, or peer relations, are not

systematically explored. What is offered is a new way of describing the relationship between disciplines and gender, in a way that foregrounds gender as symbolic of all socially subordinate positions. However, the methodology of the study means that significant aspects of both gendered and other subordinate positions are not fully explored.

The analysis of the female students within this study revealed modes of interaction that can be associated with the primacy of conformity, gendered codes of behaviour in the maintenance of a stable subjectivity. These modes of interaction take different forms: for some students they were instantiated in their silence or passivity within class discussions; other students adopted the role of facilitator or helper within the classroom; and other students offered feminising descriptions of classroom interaction that might otherwise be interpreted as either successful, within academic criteria, or masculine, in relation to codes of gender. These varied modes of interaction have been identified as different possible ways of negotiating the contradictions between academic criteria for success and social codes of femininity. However, these particular findings do not constitute an innovation in the sociological description of gender and education.

One possible way to expand current understanding of the ways in which students negotiate gender would be to attempt to describe why individual female students adopt one strategy rather than another within the classroom. The complexity of individual life histories, however, means that the specificity of such negotiating strategies cannot be captured within the generalising sociological framework of my study. My analysis confirms that the imperative to conform to gender codes contributes to the contradictions that female students have to negotiate. The level of data presented here cannot, however, provide a fuller account of the specific gendered manoeuvres of individual participants. A sociological research design that more fully incorporated psychoanalytic techniques, or a deliberate and systematic use of biographical or ethnographic methods (Wengraf, 2000, Hey, 2003) might be able to develop more personal, explanatory descriptions of the particular feminising strategies adopted by specific female students. Why did individual students within my study adopt the specific strategies that they did? The answers to this question are appropriately beyond the scope of this piece of research. It is, however, important to note this limitation in order to avoid constructing an essentialising account of the modes of interaction



adopted by female students within the study. The descriptions presented here suggest the types of strategies adopted by female students to negotiate academic settings. They do not describe the context within which individual students come to adopt one strategy rather than another.

The distinctive insights developed within this study do not, then, constitute an explanation of individual students' strategies for maintaining their gender positions. The distinctive aspect of the research lies in its description of the positioning of students within their classes as a relational effect of the interaction between the discursive fields of gender, discipline and institution. The thesis describes how strategies adopted by both male and female students occupying a subordinate, feminine position can be described in relation to specific features of the disciplines they are studying. These features, then, constitute a demand for modes of participation that can be described in gendered terms. This constitutes a distinctive approach to the description of gender and academic disciplines, but leaves many other aspects of subordinate, or feminised positions unexplored.

Significantly, the methodology of the thesis does not distinguish between the strategies or experiences of different ethnic groups that occupy subordinate, feminine positions in relation to social and academic codes. The generalising methodology of the study conflates gender, class and ethnicity into one subordinate category. While the analysis differentiates between male and female student who constitute this subordinate category, it lacks an articulated framework for the systematic analysis of ethnicity. It would be interesting, in future work, to see whether the framework for the analysis of gender and disciplines developed here could be combined with more systematic approaches to the study of discursive practices of different ethnic groups (see for example, Heath, 1983). This might add to our understanding of the contrasting experiences of male and female students from different ethnic groups within contemporary education systems.

## **7.5. Disciplines, gender, and teaching: personal reflections on the implications of the research**

In the introduction I suggested that a secondary aim of the study was to shed some light on my own educational experiences. My initial account of my experience provided a more detailed account of institutional features than of features of gendered interaction, or of disciplinary methodologies. The analysis of the disciplines within this study has reinforced my sense of the disjointed relationship that can exist between student expectations and interests and the academic disciplines that they have chosen to study. The analysis of the relationship between the academic and gendered positioning of female students has also provided a reassuring explanatory framework within which it is possible to make sense of my own experience of confusion and frustration when I was at university. At the same time, the new perspective I have gained on my own educational experience has also provided me with a structure within which to think about my position as a teacher.

The description of the three students who found themselves in conflict with the disciplinary assumptions and methodologies presented to them resonates strongly with my own experience of studying Analytical Philosophy and Political Theory. It suggests that my sense of puzzlement and disappointment with many of the texts that I studied as an undergraduate may indeed have had some external social basis. It has also clarified my understanding of the nature of such conflicts and of the difficulties that they may present for students in my classes. As a result, I have consciously tried to adopt strategies to alleviate these conflicts. In doing so, however, I have also become aware of the way my teaching is influenced by my own disciplinary background.

One strategy I have adopted within my own teaching is to attempt to incorporate the boundaries of the discipline into the course content, and to explicitly point out when students seem to be articulating ideas that would be more coherent within a different disciplinary paradigm. For example, in teaching a module on Contemporary Culture and Society which drew heavily on theories of postmodernism, I attempted throughout to draw attention to the way these modes of interpretation can be seen not only as a development from modernism, but also as a critique of dominant liberal positions that

were not represented in the set reading for the course. When students articulated strongly liberal assumptions that impeded their understanding of a set text, we could identify a framework within which their 'misunderstanding' could be seen as legitimate. Similarly, in giving feedback on an essay that attempted to analyse stereotyping in a set text at the same time as arguing against the significance of the social effects of stereotypes in general, rather than simply pointing to the weaknesses in the structure of the essay, I also commented that the specific approaches studied within the course had not provided this student with the resources to support his argument. To a certain extent, this limitation can be seen as a necessity of the curriculum. However, in the light of my analysis of the American Literature classes in my study, I can also associate the specific limitations of the course I was teaching with my own disciplinary background. Whereas the culture of literary studies tends to prioritise reading of literary texts over reading of theory, and thus to be more likely to legitimise a range of different interpretations, my background in philosophy probably contributed to my decision to include theoretical as well as cultural sources in the set reading, which inevitably acted as a limit on the range of interpretations discussed in the classes. In addition, my background in philosophy, and also in language teaching, probably contributed to my tendency to emphasise the need for correct interpretations. In the light of this, it seemed to me important to acknowledge that some students were put at a disadvantage by their initial political position, whereas others found the approaches offered on the course fitted far more closely with their initial assumptions and interests.

These personal reflections suggest some of the ways that teachers might minimise possible exclusionary effects of the disciplines that they teach. I discussed some similar ideas with one of the tutors who participated in the research. She said that just reading the summary I had sent her had helped her to think more clearly about the different ways Political Thought might be taught. Simply making teachers more aware of the way methodological choices are frequently invisible to students, she suggested, might help to increase understanding of some of the difficulties students have in grappling with disciplinary ideas. These difficulties could then be addressed more explicitly in the content and presentation of the curriculum. An alternative strategy would be for tutors to provide sensitive and informed advice about the approaches taken within different fields of study, acknowledging the limits to disciplinary methodologies, before students make choices about courses and option modules. This might help students to make more

informed choices, or at least to enter classes aware of the conflicts they may experience in attempting to identify with the discipline.

The analysis of gender within the study has also affected my understanding of both my own classroom practice and of gender relations more generally. In a way, the result that I had least predicted, and that most shocked me as I was carrying out the analysis, was the explicit and consistent gendering of the tutors' performances and of the way that this affected students' responses to their tutors. The analysis of tutors' interaction within the classroom revealed the female tutors' use of feminising strategies that had the effect of distancing them from too close an identification with the academic discourses that they were articulating. The male tutors, in contrast, showed no inclination to avoid identification with the discipline that they were teaching. In addition, the analysis of student interviews, and also of some interventions within the classroom, revealed the casualness with which some male students were willing to dismiss or to undermine the academic authority of their female tutors, as well as, in some instances, an assertion of a sexualised or flirtatious relationship that foregrounds gendered hierarchies over the academic discourses and practices of the classroom. This can be interpreted as the corollary of the female students' incorporation of feminine performances into the classroom. However, the inherent imbalance in the power relation between masculine and feminine positions means that the resonance of these gendered practices is very different. It can, nevertheless, create similar difficulties for male students as for female students, in terms of their access to the curriculum and to successful academic positions within the classroom.

This analysis has made me increasingly aware of these gendered practices in my own teaching, both in my own performance and in student responses within the classroom. I have become aware of a set of, now, almost self-conscious strategies that I use to step out of a position of academic authority when I am teaching. I have also been more analytical of the effect of my academic authority on, especially, male students. In one of my classes last year I had a specific problem with a group of male students who were underachieving, but whom I found it very difficult to offer any help. They would rebuff my approaches within the classroom, although they would be happy to interact with me and to offer me assistance in non-academic contexts. A variety of strategies set in place by the institution have helped us to address this problem productively this year. In

particular, the appointment of a high profile and pro-active disability officer constructed a route through which two of the male students I was concerned about, who were both identified as dyslexic, were able to approach me and ask for help, and together we were able to identify strategies to assist their participation in class activities and discussions. I can, though, also think of at least two male students who I did not handle so effectively, and to whom I was not able to offer the support that they probably needed.

Although the initial problem does seem to me to be at least in part to do with the fact that I am a woman in a position of academic authority, I do not think that a solution to the difficulties in my communication with these students could have been found in a conscious attempt either to further feminise or academicise my classroom practice. Either strategy would only have shifted, rather than resolved, the intersecting conflicts between my and my students' gendered and academic identities. This constitutes an aspect of gender relations that has been clarified for me by this study. I am left with a far stronger sense of the inevitability, or unavoidability of the contradictions between the gendered and academic practices of male and female practitioners and students. This does not relieve teachers of responsibility for addressing such contradictions and the difficulties that they present for students within their classes. It does, however, imply that solutions cannot be found at an individual level. In addition to administrative routes, of which the appointment of a disability officer is an example, the educational implications of contradictory gender relations might also be addressed through explicit curriculum content and reflexive activities analysing gender relations within classes and institutions.

These reflections demonstrate, perhaps, how the process of writing this thesis, while not providing answers to specific questions about my own education, has provided a framework within which my experience can be described more coherently. The process has also helped me to become more analytical about my practice, and to consider strategies for making my own teaching more accessible to students, both in the articulation of disciplinary boundaries and in the negotiation of gender relations within the classroom. It would seem to me that the description of classroom interaction developed in the thesis might also be useful to other teachers in higher education in developing a more analytical understanding of their own teaching.

## **7.6. Antagonism and overdetermination: a picture of the social**

The thesis has presented a description of student positions as constituted in relation to the discipline they are studying, the institution in which they are studying, and hegemonic codes of masculinity and femininity. Each of these discursive fields is conceptualised as an incomplete identity, instantiated within specific contexts which overdetermine different aspects of student positions. The analysis of the empirical data has revealed specific differences between the student positions produced in relation to both different institutions and different disciplines.

Political Thought, it has been argued, constructs antagonisms both in relation to feminine positions and in relation to the culture of South University and its students. Codes of appropriate feminine behaviour are in opposition to the criteria of assertiveness and self-expression associated with both the social position and the methodological structure of Political Thought. Similarly, low expectations in terms of student reading and participation within South University Political Thought produced a culture of deference to both tutor and text that was in conflict with the dominant mode of engagement with the concepts and language of the discipline. Meanwhile, the academic success of upper middle class male West University students and the identity of Political Thought as a discipline of the governing classes overdetermine each other. This has produced a depressing picture of the re-iteration of social hierarchies of both gender and class within undergraduate Political Thought classes. The marginalisation of both female students and new university students, it has been argued, is overdetermined by the position of Political Thought as a discipline closely related to the establishment and to socially dominant positions, both in terms of its subject matter, and also in terms of its narrow methodological structure.

In contrast, the multiple methods and descriptive, or critical subject matter of American Literature combined with the relatively access oriented admissions policies of both North and East University appear to produce a more egalitarian array of student positions, despite the difference in entry qualifications required by the two universities. Thus, despite the generic antagonisms between academic discourse and feminine

positions, the marginalisation of specific groups of students was not as apparent in the American Literature classes as in the Political Thought classes. It would appear, then, that when similarly politicised features of different discursive fields overlap, the effects of the stark divide within our university system, which tends to simply reproduce existing social divisions, may be mitigated. The critical, politicised position of American Literature and the explicit opportunities it offers within the curriculum to address issues of gender, class and racial thinking through a variety of legitimate methodologies are complemented by the intake of universities that have a positive approach to widening participation. The intentions of widening participation, in turn, are complemented by the varied methodological approaches and politicised curriculum content of American Literature.

In both cases, we can describe the findings of this study as observations of the dispersal of a multiplicity of social instances that coalesce around a shared signifying position in relation to the symbolic order. The explicit politicisation of practice can be identified as a signifying position shared by both access-oriented higher education institutions and contemporary approaches to literary and cultural analysis. The findings presented here suggest that this shared signifying position can have productive effects in relation to equity and participation in higher education, in so far as it can overdetermine the codification and stabilisation of previously marginal and unstable student positions. In contrast, the description of the antagonisms within undergraduate Political Thought classes identifies weaknesses in the overall symbolic articulation of the field. The differential positioning of different social groups in the Political Thought classes reveals the inconsistency of claims to autonomy and equity made in relation to both the disciplinary curriculum and the institutions. The interdependent, privileged positions represented by both West University male students and the disciplinary field of Political Thought are in part maintained by this illusion of autonomy, which conceals their privileged status. This assertion of autonomy, however, is destabilised by the revelation of contradictory inequalities in the comparative positions of both students and disciplines in relation to the social.

Contradictions within the discursive fields of gender, disciplines and institutions can, then, be identified at two levels: firstly, in relation to claims of equity within current higher education institutions and curricula; and secondly, in relation to claims to

autonomy and independence made on behalf of both academic disciplines and higher education institutions. Such claims can be described as antagonistic, because in order to sustain them, other identities – in particular the identities of students from subordinate social groups - must be symbolised in ways that repress significant features of their social constitution. What is needed is a re-codification of these subordinate positions. The analysis of the American Literature classes presented in this study suggests that, at least in some highly specific contexts, such a re-codification is not an unrealistic political objective.



## **APPENDICES**

## APPENDIX 1

### Information for participants

#### Outline of my research

The topic of my research is the relationship between disciplines, pedagogy and students in higher education. I am doing a comparison across institutions (an 'old'/highly selective university and a 'new'/access oriented university) and across two disciplines (Political Theory and American Studies/Literature). The fieldwork element will involve videoing a series of 4 or 5 sessions and interviewing the tutor and students about the discussion that took place in class. I am interested in the way in which a conception of what counts as disciplinary knowledge is produced by both teacher and students in class discussions.

#### Interviews

I will video the weekly sessions and then I will ask if you would be willing to take part in an interview about the session.

#### Written work

It would also be useful for me to see examples of the written work you are producing for the course. I will ask your tutor if it okay for me to photocopy some of your essays after they have marked them, but I will not photocopy or look at any essays without your permission.

#### Use of the research data

In anything that I write arising from this research, pseudonyms will be used for both institutions and individuals, and as far as possible, any specific identifying features will be altered. I will not speak to anyone in your university about information that you provide.

Transcripts, videos and tapes of classes and tapes of interviews will normally only be viewed/listened to by myself. However, in the university where I am studying, there are sometimes classes or seminars to help students with their analysis. It is possible that I might wish to present small sections of data at one of these sessions. If you would prefer that I do not show any data that you have participated in at one of these sessions, please let me know.

#### Feedback

I will be transcribing the sessions that I video, and I will e-mail you copies of the transcripts (unless you don't want me to).

I will arrange to come and present some of the results of my research at your university.

If you would like any further information, you can contact me by e-mail: [clalapping@hotmail.com](mailto:clalapping@hotmail.com), or by post, at: Flat 7, 1 Bishop's Road, N6 4HP

Thank you for your help,  
Claudia Lapping

## APPENDIX 2

**All names have been changed**

### 1. West University Political Thought Class

Information from students who completed a background information questionnaire (completed in class).

Name	Age	Previous education (Type of school, highest previous qualifications)	Parents school leaving age Or highest qualification	Ethnic background (inferred)
Tom	19	State comprehensive 3 A's at A level	Doctorate	(White UK)
Jake	19	State comprehensive 5 A levels	Both post graduate qualifications	(White UK)
Rachel	20	Independent, fee paying 3 A levels	15 / 16 CSE / O level	(White Welsh)
Megan	20	Fee paying Catholic/ Ivy league US university	18	(White US)
Ruby	19	Independent, fee paying, 3 A levels, 1 A/S level	Doctorate	(UK Asian)
Mark	20	French State School in the US + 1 year of 'Prepare' for les grands ecoles.	Masters	French
Corrine	20	Independent, fee paying 4 A levels	Masters	Not known
Sarah	18	Private International School in Brazil, Austria and Germany. International Baccalaureat	Degree	Not known
Charlotte	18	State Comprehensive. 5 A levels	Doctorate	(White UK)

Information collected about other students in the group.

Name	Age	Other information	Information about background (inferred)
Michael	18?	Studying Politics and Economics. Made referenced to lifestyles that suggested a wealthy, upper middle class background.	(White UK)
Greg	18?	Told me he had applied to Cambridge, but chosen West University for the urban social life.	(White UK, privately educated)

## 2. South University Political Thought Class

Information from students who completed a background information questionnaire (circulated by e-mail)

Name	Age	Previous education (Type of school, highest previous qualifications)	Parents school leaving age Or highest qualification	Ethnic background (inferred)
Laura	20	State Comprehensive + FE college, HND Music/Dance	Degree	Born in Trinidad, secondary education in UK
Gabor	28	Soviet schools in Hungary. Also schools in Algeria, Mongolia, US	Postgraduate	(Hungarian)
Guy	18	State Comprehensive D at A level	Degree	(White UK)
Andy	18	State Comprehensive A level	O level	(White UK)
Will	30	State Comprehensive 2 A levels	15	(White UK)

Information collected about other students in the group.

Name	Mature student – Yes/No	Other information	Information about background (inferred)
Nadia	No	Worked for an MP in her year off.	Mother Polish, came to UK as a student.
Omar	No?	Spasmodic attendance.	(North African?)
Waheed	Yes	Sometimes couldn't attend because of work commitments. Sometimes wrote for an Egyptian newspaper. Poor English, so couldn't easily follow the classes.	Egyptian. Did an Access course in the UK before starting the degree.
Tamsin	No?	Slightly spasmodic attendance. Sometimes left before the seminar. Job?	(black UK)
Ozra	Yes?	Very keen, asked a lot of questions in class.	(Turkish?)
Katrin	Yes?	Interested in animal rights. Slightly irregular attendance. Rarely spoke in class.	(East European)
Julie	Yes	Didn't speak during observed sessions.	(Black UK?)
Simon	No?	Didn't speak during observed sessions.	(White UK?)

## 3. North University American Literature Class

Information from students who completed a background information questionnaire (completed in class)

Name/ Year of degree	Age	Previous education (Type of school, highest previous qualifications)	Parents school leaving age Or highest qualification	Ethnic background/ languages spoken at home
Bashir 3 <sup>rd</sup> year	20	Independent, fee paying A levels	Not known	English + Bengali

Ambia 3 <sup>rd</sup> year	24	State Comprehensive A levels	Pakistani higher education qualifications	Urdu
Razia 3 <sup>rd</sup> year	20	State comprehensive and FE college 3 A levels	21 and 16, Indian Qualifications	English and Bengali
David 3 <sup>rd</sup> year	20	State Comprehensive A levels	Masters	English and Polish
Rajpal 3 <sup>rd</sup> year	21	State comprehensive A levels	16	Syneti, went to school in Bangladesh
Sevket 3 <sup>rd</sup> year	21	State comprehensive + FE college A levels (BBC)	O levels ?	English and Turkish
Ranjiv 2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	22	State comprehensive + FE college 3 A levels, grade A	O levels	Creole
Tessa 3 <sup>rd</sup> Year	23	State comprehensive A levels + Diploma Foundation Art	degrees	English
Rowan 2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	20	State comprehensive 5 A levels, grades A	degree	English
Sue 3 <sup>rd</sup>	21	US high school	Masters in Business	English
Ed 2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	22	State grammar A levels	MA in English	English
Martha 3 <sup>rd</sup> year	21	US high school	Masters	English
Caroline 2 <sup>nd</sup> year	20	State comprehensive A levels	O levels	English
Peter 3 <sup>rd</sup> year	21	State comprehensive A levels	16	English
Josephine 3 <sup>rd</sup> year	20	State comprehensive A levels	O levels	English ( Black UK?)
Joanne 2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	19	State comprehensive A levels	CSE	English

Leela 2 <sup>nd</sup> year	21	State comprehensive + FE college A levels	O level	English
Ashita 2 <sup>nd</sup> year	19	State comprehensive + FE college A levels	18 / A levels	English, Urdu, Punjabi
Meera 2 <sup>nd</sup> year	19	State comprehensive + FE college A levels	Not known	English and Punjabi
Rose 3 <sup>rd</sup> Year	21	State + 3 years fee paying, in Finland and the USA High School Diploma	Doctorate	Finnish and English
Finn 3 <sup>rd</sup> Year	25	State comprehensive A levels	Not known	English, Welsh

Information collected about other students in the group.

Name	Age	Other information	Information about background (inferred)
Jonathan	20?	Was on a one semester exchange programme.	(Black US)
Dean	20?	3 <sup>rd</sup> year student. Had done previous modules on slavery.	

#### 4. East University American Literature Class

Information collected about students in the group

Name	Mature student? (yes /no)	Other information	Information about background (inferred)
Monica	No	A levels in Media, English and Sociology.	Mother currently completing a law degree at East University. Father Iranian
Hamid	Yes	Sometimes works as a translator.	Completed a degree in Iran before coming to the UK.
Helen	yes	Works in a drug rehabilitation centre	(Black UK?)
Greg	no		(White UK)
Errol	Yes	Full time job sometimes prevents him attending class.	(Black UK?)
Francesca	Yes	Changed to morning class because of work commitments.	Italian
Edward	Yes	Originally left school at 16 and worked in the army.	(White UK)
Christine	No	On exchange programme from US university	(White US)
Alicia	No	On exchange programme from US university.	(White US)

## APPENDIX 3

### Student Interview Schedule – Example

N.B. The structure of the interview remained the same throughout. The extracts and the list of concepts varied for each interview.

#### Introduction.

I am interested in the relationship between the subject/discipline you are studying, the students and the teacher, and how these three together produce knowledge in the classroom.

First of all I am going to ask you some questions about the session I observed and about some of the concepts used in the session. Then I will ask you a few questions about your perception of the class, the other students, and the teacher.

If there are any questions you do not wish to answer, or if you have any questions about anything, please say.

[Throughout the interview, add probe questions to get students to expand on explanations about the discipline.]

1. How do you feel about attending these classes? [Do you look forward to them? What aspects do you look forward to/ not look forward to? What is the purpose of the sessions? What is your role in the sessions?]
2. What would you say that last week's session was about?
3. Here are some concepts that were used or discussed in the session (Show list on next page):
  - Can you define one that you find comparatively easy?
  - Can you define one that you find comparatively difficult?
  - Would you use these terms yourself?
  - How did you feel about the discussion/use of these terms in the class?
4. Now I want you to talk about several small sections of the lesson.

1. p. 2, tutor: 'what he's saying here...' to p. 3, tutor: '...the collapse of civilisation as we know it..'  
Why did you ask this question?  
How did you feel about the tutor's response?

2. p. 5, : 'It's just that in saying...' to p. 6, , '... individual circumstances of each society.'  
What did you think of the discussion at this point?  
Did you agree with any of the points made?  
Can you relate this part of the discussion to Marx's ideas?

3. p. 8, : 'I would argue that actually...' to : '.... So, they just sit there..'  
What did you think of the discussion at this point?  
Could you explain the point you were making in a bit more detail?  
How did you feel about the response to your contribution?

4. p. 1, 'Could you explain dialectical...' to Richard, p. 1: '... so it's an active materialism..'  
What did you think of this question?  
What did you think of the tutor's response?

I also have a couple of questions about the session 2 weeks ago on Rousseau and Burke. First, to remind you a bit, I've got a list of the concepts from that session...

4, p. 4 Q about difference between Rousseau and Marx..

In what way did you feel that Marx and Rousseau are similar?

How did you feel about the tutor's response?

5. p. 1: Q about French revolution and Rousseau.

What was confusing you about the relationship between Rousseau and the French revolution?

How did you feel about tutor's response to your question?

5. Are there any other points in the lesson that you would like to comment on?
6. How would you define the subject/discipline you are studying in this course/module?
7. What is your impression, very generally of the other students in the class? Are there some students who make particularly useful contributions?
8. What is your impression of the teacher? What is your impression of the teacher's position in relation to the subject / discipline you are studying? Do you have a sense of your own position within the discipline?
9. Have you got any questions?  
Is there anything you would like to add to any of the areas we have discussed?
10. Part time/full time? age? Job? Educational background/ exams?

### List of concepts for question 3

Liberalism

Idealism

Materialism

Dialectical materialism

Passive materialism

Civil society

The state

Class

Slave society – feudal system – modern capitalism

Social change / political change

A universal class

Self interest

Exploitation

Alienation

Representation vs delegation

The wages of the average worker

The withering away of the state



## APPENDIX 4

### **Tutor Interview Schedule – example: East University American Literature tutor**

Hannah – 6<sup>th</sup> November 01

1. Are there any points you want to talk about from the sessions?
2. What do you see as the purpose of these sessions?
3. I've picked out a couple of sections to look at...
  - a. Olaudah, p. 3 student's use of 'detailed..' - what did you think of what she was saying in general? What do you think she means when she uses the term 'detailed'?
  - b. Olaudah, p. 4 – 5 : student's description of Paine's language... is she saying the same thing about rhetoric as you were?
  - c. 2<sup>nd</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> October: Talking about sexuality and race... do you think this requires reflexive analysis on the part of the students?
  - d. student on the slave trade 9<sup>th</sup> Oct, p. 15 , what did you think was going on? What do you think his idea of what he is studying might be? Is it the same as what *you* think he is studying?
4. I've also picked out a couple of points about the mode of analysis...
  - a. 9<sup>th</sup> October, p. 3. metaphorical rather than logical deduction? How would you describe the difference between the kind of arguments you construct in Literature and arguments in philosophy? Which do you think is more difficult?
  - b. How is this module different from other modules in the literature programme? American studies vs English lit?
  - c. How do you decide what reading to prioritise, i.e. text over theory?
5. Are there any other points you would like to raise?

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